



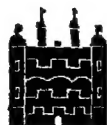
INDIA FOR THE INDIANS



# INDIA FOR THE INDIANS

BY

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TO JACK,

*for managing to understand both the Indians and myself*



# CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
	TO THE READER FROM THE AUTHOR . . .	9
I.	GRAND ILLUSION. . . . .	13
II.	ELUSIVE ECONOMICS . . . . .	31
III.	THE WAKENING SEX . . . . .	50
IV.	VOTE TRICKS . . . . .	67
V.	PRINCIPALITIES AND POWERS. . . . .	86
VI.	BOOK-LEARNING AND BABEL . . . . .	103
VII.	ADDING INSULT TO INDUSTRY . . . . .	122
VIII.	SOCIAL DEATH . . . . .	141
IX.	MARTIAL MUSIC AND TRAVELOGUES . . . . .	160
X.	BAZAARS AND BAKSHEESH . . . . .	180
XI.	VILLAGE VAGARIES . . . . .	200
XII.	INFLUENTIAL CIRCLE . . . . .	220



## TO THE READER FROM THE AUTHOR

If you are one of those individuals who like their sociology and politics neat, then you may as well rid yourself of this book by wrapping it up straight away and sending it off to Aunt Penelope or Cousin Elmer as a birthday gift. The same applies if you demand reading matter entirely free from bias or prejudices. You will not find it here. I rejoice in as healthy a set of prejudices as anyone alive.

Nine years ago, during my first period of residence in India, I came to the conclusion that the greatest thing that British rule had done for the sub-continent was to bring it, socially and politically, closer to unity than had ever been achieved before in its long and stormy history. I still think so. I believe it was a tragedy that when British control was withdrawn, it was not withdrawn in favour of a government covering the whole of what now forms the *independent states of India and Pakistan*.

So when I returned to look at the new India in 1949, I started with a bias. Fortunately, as with most of my prejudices, there were other considerations pulling just as strongly in the opposite direction. That stopped me from following the obvious course of looking only at those changes which would prove that the partition of the country had been unrelieved loss. My conviction that it would have been for the best if the British could have completed their job, does not blind me to the fact that it would only have been for the best if the process of unification could have been continued with the agreement and whole-hearted co-operation of the peoples of India. It clearly could not. And to try to continue rule over peoples whose only politically-conscious members were almost unanimously hostile to foreign influence could not have resulted in good for anybody.

My observations and comments refer mainly to the new India. Many of them may apply with equal force to Pakistan. I do not know. For the purpose of this book, I have tried to keep the conception of a united sub-continent completely out of the picture, and to concentrate on India as she is to-day.

I am prejudiced against the Indian climate throughout the greater part of the country ; against filth, disease, and the poverty which breeds and perpetuates them both ; against stupidity and ignorance ; and against whatever seems to me to be " phony ".

I have a strong prejudice in favour of India's wealth of art and philosophy ; the industry and good humour of the peasants who form the bulk of the populace ; and the immensely-increased likeability of that one per cent of the Indian population which will for a long time to come be the real rulers under any form of government, unless India sinks into anarchy.

With good fortune, the new India may become a vitally important factor in world affairs. Indeed, situated as she is, she can hardly fail to be of the greatest importance to the rest of the world—good fortune or ill.

Her gravest danger, apart from the constant menace of too little food for too many stomachs, is that her one per cent of genuinely-educated inhabitants may continue to see things as they would wish them to be and not as they really are.

I am glad that India has attained her independence. It has made an astonishing difference to the Indians whom the foreigner is likely to meet ; and they are the idea-forming minority. They have become infinitely pleasanter to know. It may have the same effect on the European communities in India. Lots of them always were grand people ; but there were all too many who deteriorated rapidly in the Indian mental climate. They contracted acute megalomania at an early stage of their residence in the country, and

gradually progressed to a chronic condition. Newcomers to India now should be in less danger, and may remain the decent, ordinary folks they were at home. -

All those who knew India in the past would find great changes if they were to return. Some might think that they were all for the worse. Others might not be able to find any fault with the new regime. That would depend entirely on their personal prejudices.

My own bias in this matter is that Indian independence is a good thing. It is right and proper that the Indians should rule themselves. It would be hard for any true American to feel otherwise about any peoples. Mistakes are being made and will be made. It would be unnatural if it were not so.

What I have tried to do in the following pages is to let all my prejudices loose so that they can cancel each other out. I trust that you readers will find entertainment, if not edification, in the result.

D. J. W.





## CHAPTER I

### GRAND ILLUSION

ACCOUNTS of the fabled Indian rope trick are inconceivable until one has visited India. After that, they sound quite understandable, if not entirely natural. This is not to say that they become credible ; merely that it becomes easier to realise that a man might convince himself that he had seen the trick performed. There is such a wonderful unreality about India, as a whole, that minor mysteries such as that of a small boy climbing into oblivion up a rope suspended from nothing are hardly worth bothering about. In a metaphorical sense, something of the kind is happening every day in India. Indeed, one might almost say that life itself in this country is an illustration of that grand illusion. The sub-continent and the way of life do not really exist at all, but are projections of thought upon an eternity of negation.

This was the feeling that India gave to me when I lived there for six years during the Second World War. To-day, despite innumerable changes, some for the better and some for the worse, my predominant reaction is still the same—one of a sensation of having become in some way detached from the hard world of reality. It is a curious feeling to be engendered by a country where life for the masses is even harder than in most others, and infinitely harder than in the United States or Great Britain. The facts are enough to vouch for that. In a land area comparatively large live more than three hundred million people. Much of the total area is entirely barren. Most of the rest is fertile only as far as uncertain monsoon rains will permit. The population is growing by millions every year. Development will be difficult and slow. And if that does not add

up to the most unkind reality, my studies in economics back home in Pennsylvania were sadly wasted.

Whence, then, springs this strange detachment ?

The question might hardly be worth asking if its source were exclusively personal. But it is not. It is a reaction to India that many foreigners have experienced and expressed in my hearing with greater or lesser degree of precision.

During the last war, in Delhi, a British Tommy and an American G.I. spoke of it as I walked past them round Connaught Circus. They were standing side by side surveying one of the many "India for the Indians" and "Quit India" legends chalked on the walls between the shops.

"That makes me laugh," said the Tommy, in a tone in which there lurked no trace of humour. "What wouldn't I give to quit right here and now !"

"Uh-huh," assented the G.I. "I kinda know how you feel, but for the life of me I can't figger jest why I'd give such a lot to pack up out of it."

"I know bloody well why I want to clear out," retorted the Tommy. "Because, apart from the heat and the smells, there's nothing about the place that makes sense. That's why."

"You got something there," came the G.I.'s reply as I moved out of earshot and lost the rest of his remarks.

That snatch of conversation stuck in my mind because it gave an interesting glimpse of men very differently placed to most of those who had said something of the same kind. They had experienced that same impression just as it had impinged upon a very learned and studious senior official of the Indian Civil Service. He was no war-time visitor. He had spent the greater part of his working life in India. The country and its well-being were his business, and his main interest in life as well. He spoke several of the vernacular languages fluently. In short, if anyone should

have been able to get the feel of the land, he was the man. Yet it was he who said :

" You know, it is part of the fascination of India that, however long you stay here, you will always have the feeling that you might walk round a corner and walk into another century, or wake up in the morning to find yourself back in the English countryside, and that what had seemed like crowded years had in fact been but a dream."

" Why should it be so ? " I asked thoughtfully.

" Who can tell ? " he shrugged. " Perhaps it is because in India the past is not dead, and the dead are as alive as the living. Or it may be that we are bemused by a variety of coexistent patterns of society so complex that it is difficult to relate them to one another."

" Do you think the contrast between extreme wealth and incredible poverty is so dramatic that it contributes to this peculiar atmosphere ? " I suggested.

" That could be part of the explanation," he retorted, " but only a very small part. There are contrasts just as vivid in Rome, or Paris, or London, or for that matter in New York. But they don't inspire the same sense of illusion. Of the lot, New York is the only place which has ever given me, momentarily, the sensation which is part of life here. When I first saw the centre of that city, I had an impulse to shut my eyes, tell myself it wasn't true, and then open them again to find out if those fantastic chasms and cliffs were still there. But that feeling didn't last more than a few minutes, and in any case it was confined to a single section of one city. Here it stretches over the whole country, in city and countryside alike."

We probed no further into Indian unreality on that occasion. But since then, others have made the same point.

Whatever the source of it in pre-independence India, the politically-conscious among the Indians in Delhi, Bombay, and other great towns, were undoubtedly responsible for

confirming it in the minds of all foreigners. In some respects, the majority of them were unreality incarnate. They proclaimed that all problems and troubles were caused by alien rule. That was obviously good politics. Where it became just a trifle crazy was when they made it quite evident that they had convinced themselves of the truth of their saying. There were honourable exceptions; but as a rule it was impossible to extract a coherent statement from an Indian on problems of the future which would clearly have to be faced.

In the days when the Muslim separatist movement, which eventually led to Pakistan, was becoming steadily more vociferous, it was pointless to expect any enlightenment on how the situation might develop from the parties one might have expected to be most interested. Members of the Muslim League merely insisted that they must have Pakistan. They did not deign to discuss any other possibility. If one were rash enough to suggest that the majority in the sub-continent might not want the country split, the most favourable response was likely to be the assurance, with a flash of the eyes or a gritting of the teeth, that the Muslims had been the rulers of the land before the British took over. Most Hindus gave the obverse answer. They outnumbered the Muslims by three to one, they commented, and if the Muslims should be foolish enough to try to resist the "will of the people," they would know very well how to deal with that issue. But in the main, the answer was even more unrealistic. "Oh, but that question will never arise," they would chant happily. "This is only one of the results of alien rule. The British have stirred up this agitation in order to have an excuse for maintaining their own domination. When we have achieved 'swaraj,' we shall all live in peace and amity together."

Long after it had become patently and almost painfully clear that the British were not fooling and really did plan to pull up their stakes, most Indians continued to believe

that a mere declaration by an outside body would bring the millennium to India. Anyone would have thought that they had all been reading too much Lin Yutang and had taken their ideas of history from him. All history of the endless strife between races and religions throughout India's recorded existence was blandly ignored. Calculations and expectations were based, apparently, on the intriguing but baseless theory that all inhabitants of the peninsula had been men and brothers without a trace of friction between them before the wicked invaders from the West came to teach the wicked lessons of war in the havens of peace and idyllic pursuits. On the economic side, they were founded on what can only have been a touching faith that two ears of corn would grow where one grew before as soon as the sowers sang to the fields that the heel of the foreign despot had been lifted.

Independence has changed the character of the illusion ; but it has not removed or weakened it. To-day's talk is filled with articles of faith as bewildering as the confidence in the efficacy of independence to cure anything from nation-wide famine to an ingrowing toenail.

One of the tenets of the new illusion is that the Indian is in need of protection from evil influences brought to bear by foreign movies. Some films sent over from the United States this year have been formally and solemnly debarred from exhibition in Indian cities "because sexual aspects of these films might have an adverse effect on public morals."

Well, really ! American producers do at times turn out some very poor movies. Probably plenty of them ought to be barred as inartistic, corny, or just plain dull. Others might suitably come under a ban as a result of their tendency to glorify brutality. But as for sex ! That reasoning does not make sense at all.

The announcement of this decision amused me so much that the temptation to tease my friend Misri, who was

having tea with me when the notice in a newspaper caught my eye, was too strong to be resisted.

"I'm sorry to see that the youth of India are in danger of being corrupted by Hollywood," I commented, solemn of face.

Misri moved his head gently from side to side in that oddly graceful gesture similar to American dissent but conveying, in fact, deprecatory agreement. "It is a pity. I hope it won't be considered as unfriendly. We don't wish to criticise your country or even your film industry. This ban is solely for the protection of the young people, I am sure. The protection of the young people's minds is most important, especially in a country engaged in rebuilding itself entirely. It is a matter of seeing that they have the proper ideals and that they follow the right patterns."

"Oh, I agree, Misri," I remarked airily, "but I couldn't help wondering what had crept into a Hollywood film that the youth of India wouldn't already have learned long ago from the wide choice of erotic literature piled high in every bazaar in the country. More booklets on sex are displayed than on any other six subjects put together."

"You need not go to the bazaars, Dorotee," came the high, clear voice of Durga who had arrived rather late to join us. "Most of your film producers could probably learn much they haven't even guessed at by visiting some of our temples."

It was an example that I would not, or could not, have raised. Religion is a matter for the individual. As a guest in the country, it would have been ungracious for me to have reminded Misri of the phallic symbols and the liquid brown eyes of some of the astonishing frescoes which liberally bespatter Hindu temples with illustrations that would land any American in jail at top speed for gross pornography. But I was not sorry that one of his countrywomen and co-religionists had raised it. Durga had put her finger on precisely the crux of the illusion. Nothing Hollywood could

ever conceive of could be capable of shocking or corrupting youngsters who had visited their own country's temples.

Misri had the grace to look somewhat shamefaced, but that he was not shorn of his beliefs was explicit in his deprecatory "Ah, but that's different."

With many countries, such banning of films would be susceptible of two explanations—either that the local film industry had a pretty strong pull, or that all concerned were a pack of hypocrites. In India, neither explanation will stand up. The local film industry does not produce anything like enough films to meet the demand. It can probably go on expanding for a long time to come before there is any danger of a real collision of interests between Indian and imported products. Besides, films made in the local idiom, both in terms of plot and dialogue, can never be in direct competition with Hollywood productions. They are so completely different that they must appeal to largely complementary audiences. As for the possible charge of hypocrisy, the most obtuse observer need spend only a few weeks in the country to arrive at the conclusion that the Indians are incapable of such an attitude. It is an essential element of hypocrisy that the culprit should be well aware of the truth and should be distorting it to serve his own ends. That clearly is not the case. A belief that Indian youth might be perverted by the sex implications of American films is only a fragment of a great illusion which has fastened itself upon the entire vocal section of the country.

Whatever the source of the conviction may be, Indians have definitely arrived at the comforting thought that they are an immensely superior race. It expresses itself in a "holier-than-thou" attitude which makes me sympathise most earnestly with all Indians and others who have had relays of missionaries descend upon them. It becomes remarkably easy to understand how martyrs achieve their status after one has been subjected for a time to that glow



of self-righteousness exuded by those who feel themselves to be of the elect.

In the days before India attained independence, the illusion already had its roots. It was a pet argument of the intelligentsia of leading centres of the country that India had fallen under alien rule because the Indians were so much upon the spiritual plane that they had proved unable to hold their own against the material and technical ability of the West.

Suresh, slim, bland as an underfed Buddha, used to expatiate upon the theme by the hour. To give him his due, it probably was true in his case. To my knowledge he had turned down posts which would have brought him a higher income, because he did not wish to change to a new occupation which might make greater demands upon his leisure time that he employed in reading and discussion.

"It is only to be expected that we should be among the oppressed peoples," he would sigh. "The British are practical and hard-headed. They think of the realities and deal with the practical. We live in the realm of the spirit. They jeer at us because our village wells are polluted and because our cities are unhygienic. But to us, a man's soul is more important than the comforts of his body. Perhaps we are wrong. Perhaps we should stop thinking, and act."

"Come on now, Suresh," I would rally him, "you don't really believe all that, do you?"

"Of course I do," would come the indignant rejoinder. "We had our great days as warriors and scientists while the British were still running about in skins. Now we have advanced far beyond such considerations into the realms of pure thought, and speculations on the nature of the essence of life and not upon those manifestations which can be weighed and measured by armies of ultra-intelligent apes with microscopes and test tubes."

That is a fairly typical sample of the pre-war form of the grand illusion. It was easy to explain. It was the old

story of sour grapes. Temporal power had fallen into other hands. Let it go, and lay claim to some other attribute.

Spirituality is always a good line for anyone to ascribe to him- or herself, or to one it is desired to honour but whose talents are hard to define. It was specially sound for Indians. They could find an immensity of *prima facie* evidence to support their case. There has seldom been a race whose educated and cultured members have had as great a fecundity of ideas and subtlety of interpretation. Visitors who took their impressions solely from the upper crust might well have left prepared to preach the gospel according to Suresh and his friends.

Outside the infinitesimal proportion of the population which took part in such exhilarating intellectual exercises, little support for the theory could be discovered. Peasant, merchant, banya and politician, all had as sharp an eye for the main chance as could be found among their counterparts anywhere in the wide world. Indeed, the money-lender who had attempted, in the Western world, to demonstrate his grasp of material realities by the same methods as were common in India would have had a pretty rough time. The British passed laws to limit interest and mitigate the worst evils of the mortgage system ; but among the congested millions of the countryside the writ of the law ran only where someone opened the door to let it in.

When I was back in India this year, I expected to find that the "minds-above-mundane-matters" school would have vanished along with the conditions which gave it birth. Not a bit of it. It has grown larger and more vociferous. And from a faith in the Indian knowledge of the eternal verities, as opposed to the internal combustion engine and the flush-closet, it has developed into an all-embracing superiority. Oddly enough, the facets of the Indian character that are most frequently fastened upon by public speakers, and in private conversation, for commendation are the two one would have least expected. To-day it is almost

impossible for a public man in India to deliver an address without his insisting upon Indian tolerance. These sentiments are often coupled with references to the innate sense of reverence of the people. And just to make sure that the stranger within the gates shall be forced to the conclusion that a looking-glass has been substituted for the traditional Gateway of India, both qualities are normally described as deriving from the Hindu religion.

Mass self-hypnosis is the only feasible explanation for this outstanding feature of present-day India.

On the first anniversary of Gandhi's "asthi," immense crowds poured out of Bombay to the stretch of beach where some of his ashes had been immersed. It was certainly an impressive demonstration. But to the outsider it seemed pitifully incongruous. Speaker after speaker waxed eloquent on the virtues of the Mahatma and on the fidelity with which his precepts were being pursued. Pæans on mutual love floated through the rest of the hot air from innumerable platforms on the outskirts of a city where the remnants of the Muslim minority move in an atmosphere of nervous tension. Many of them, like my own bearer, Abdul, wear Hindu headdress to conceal their origin and religion.

Focus of the day's observances was a bronze statue of Gandhi. Masses of garlands had been hung upon it and strewn around the dais on which it rests. Every second adult and every child carried a little flag of saffron, white and green, inscribed "Jai Hind." But all round the shrine, hawkers plied their wares noisily. They yelled and wailed to attract the attention of passers-by to the merits of the sticky sweetmeats of violent colours, or curried noodles, or hot dishes of highly-spiced meat and pastry which they had for sale. Betel-pan addicts ejected blood-red streaks into the sand at the very foot of the platform. Most of the milling mob ignored entirely the collection-box for charity beside the shrine; but every now and again one of the chattering, laughing multitude would throw a few annas

into it. As my companion and I looked on, several men with flushed faces and unsteady legs thrust notes into the box, closely observed by a white-robed figure who lifted the container and weighed it thoughtfully in his hands as they moved off again, appraising the state of the box-office.

One of his colleagues noted the foreigners. He was portly, shaven-headed, and intolerably self-important. His stomach forced a passage through the crowd towards us.

"Please. Step this way. Beautiful representation of Gandhiji."

Outspread hands and the clamour of his voice made it clear that we were expected to approach for a closer inspection.

"Observe spectacles, please," went on the rotund voice. "Real, steel-rimmed spectacles as Gandhiji wore in life. Figure is seated on sacred lotus flower. Symbolic, you know."

It was a grotesque reproduction of a barker at a fair. At any moment I expected the man beside the collection-box to bang on a drum and shout "Roll up, roll up, roll up. Pay what you like. Come and see the perfect statue of Mahatma Gandhi."

Our embarrassed silence displeased the showman.

"Is it not very fine?" he demanded.

"It is a remarkably lifelike statue of a great leader," I answered truthfully.

"Ah yes." The showman transformed himself instantaneously. Face and voice alike acquired solemnity. "Bapu showed us all the road to follow. That is why we so worship him. He taught us right living and right thinking. This will be a reminder so that in the future as now all our people will keep to his teachings."

I said nothing, but my companion asked, "Do you think that India is carrying out his policy of tolerance and understanding?"

"Ah yes," the stout man replied, with great earnestness. "All that the Mahatma taught was what he knew was best suited to his people. He knew that they are tolerant, so he taught that we should make ourselves always more tolerant, since it is easier to improve virtues we have by nature, is it not? He was a Hindu of the Hindus, and the Hindu is tolerant because his religion teaches him so."

"Some people must have forgotten their religion and Gandhi's teaching pretty thoroughly in the past year or so," Jack commented dryly. "In some parts of the country they expressed their toleration with lathis and any other weapons they could lay hands on."

"Oh, but even the best of men might forget when provocation is so bad, is it not?" was the terse reply.

That is the way it goes. Instead of thinking of what they can do to avoid riots, there is a profound tendency to concentrate on claims, which to an impartial observer would appear to be about as well founded as a kid's castle built a foot above the rising tide.

The core and heart of the grand illusion is that Indians are of virtue above the normal because they are exceptionally religious. This has been said to me, or in my hearing, not once but hundreds of times in the course of my post-independence visit; but even the most enthusiastic devotee of the cult has not ventured to expound in detail what he meant by religious. In nearly every case the reference was to Hinduism, and with all due respects to its followers, that is too vague and uncertain to exercise a decisive influence on an entire people.

"What is the essence of Hinduism?" I remember demanding once of a very wise saddik, too old and too sane to be perturbed by anything but eternity. "What are the basic tenets of the Hindu faith?"

He sat in the shade without answering for several minutes. A twig in his lean, wrinkled hand traced symbols in the dust, erased them again, and wove fresh patterns ceaselessly.

"What is the essence of the blue of the sky?" he replied quietly. "You seek knowledge. That is good. You ask me where you can read of our knowledge. Great scholars have translated our Rig-Veda, our Upanishads, the Bhagavad-Gita, into your English. I do not know if they have written well. My eyes are no longer my servants. At Benares many years ago they told me that it was well done. I do not know. But you have read and still you ask questions. Why? Because you of the West are restless. You will not wait. You do not know the only thing that matters. You do not know that knowledge is not wisdom. If you have read the sacred writings, you have the beginnings of all knowledge. Now you must wait until it pleases to grow into wisdom."

"But surely," I persisted, "there must be ways of understanding besides waiting for old age, and meditation."

"Define! Define!" he cried. "Always you must try to define. So, you would cut open the tiger to find why his heart beats so fiercely. For you, it is enough to obey your Ten Commandments and you will be a good Hindu."

"But the Ten Commandments are part of the Christian doctrine . . ." I began.

One quivering old hand signalled me to silence. "You ask the essence of Hinduism. I tell you. It is what you can understand. For you it is all of Hinduism. Hinduism is everything and nothing. It is the first finger of false dawn and the full heat of midday. Each man takes from it what he is capable of putting into it."

In the years which have passed since that talk, it has grown more and more apparent that he gave the key to whatever religion India may be said to have; for according to the temperament of those who profess it, Hinduism assumes innumerable forms, pleasing and otherwise.

Not long after my return to this new India which has grown so conscious of its moral superiority to the rest of

the world, events conspired to give me an intimate view of that sensibility and depth of religious feeling to which so many references were made within a week or two of my arrival in the country. I was invited to a Hindu wedding. It was a really big show. Money was marrying money, and the ceremony was to be conducted with full rites.

Kutti, a Madrassi living in Bombay, acted as my escort and led the way to the quarters where the wedding was to take place. It lay in the heart of the Bhuleshwar Bazaar, and when we were ushered into a suite of rooms carnivalled with coloured lights, streamers, garlands and tinsel, I was on the point of asking if we had not made some mistake and strayed into a bargain sale. Then I took a clearer look at the saris of the women among the two or three hundred guests already milling in the over-scented air.

"Ooof," I panted to Kutti, as he made our way forcibly towards a raised dais at one end of the innermost room, "don't you think it would be kinder to everybody if marriages in this climate were held either very late at night or very early in the morning?"

"Ha-ha," he tittered, politely but not very convincingly. "You make good jokes."

"It wasn't meant to be a joke," I assured him. "It does seem silly to me, to pack all these overdressed people into hot rooms for hours on end at this time of day."

"But this is the hour and the day selected by the astrologers as auspicious," he said seriously.

As we settled into hard, wooden chairs on one side of the platform, Kutti took me patiently over the steps which had been followed to achieve the day's ceremony.

"You see," he explained, "in good families, and those who have not become Westernised, the system is simple. When a boy reaches marriageable age, his parents let it be known that they wish to find him a bride of the right caste and preferably one who has a substantial dowry to offer.

Friends of the prospective bride's family, or perhaps a marriage-broker, make the first approaches and the family priest draws the horoscopes of both the young people. If they're well suited to each other, the marriage contract is drawn up and very careful calculations are made so that a day may be found when the stars of both groom and bride are favourably placed. In many cases, the groom never sets eyes on his wife-to-be until the wedding night when the veil is lifted. But they get to know each other quickly after that."

"Is that the bridegroom?" I gestured towards a solemn figure squatted on a cushion in the centre of the stage, staring impassively into the kaleidoscope flickering across his line of vision, and occasionally licking his thick lips. It was impossible to tell from his expression whether the movement was caused by nervousness, or the recollection of a good meal, or a rather indelicate expectation of his bride's virtues. The second alternative seemed the most probable.

"He doesn't look much like a bridegroom, does he?" I pursued.

"How do you mean?" Kutti demanded.

"Well, he might be waiting for a train to come in. Boredom is written all over his face."

"Oh, he probably is bored," my informant shrugged. "He is sure to have been sitting there for hours already and it will be many hours yet before he can leave."

We sat on. Ices were proffered in profusion. These I declined, with painful memories of dysentery induced by indulgence in an earlier period before I learned that the European stomach has not the same tolerance towards germs as that of the Indian. Sickly, aerated drinks of lurid colour seemed safer, but produced symptoms which made me feel like belching as heartily as many of the other guests were doing.

In an anteroom, musicians thumped and squealed as



though each man was being paid on piece rates and was determined to make the most of the occasion whatever the others might do.

"Don't they ever stop?" I shouted at Kutti during a particularly impassioned outburst.

"Of course not," he replied, wagging his head tolerantly at my ignorance. "They are playing so that the gods will not hear the usual sneezings and belchings, which are unpropitious and might attract evil spirits."

The young groom shifted his Gandhi cap and scratched at the crutch of his over-tight white trousers which fitted his legs like jodhpurs.

A squat, little, elderly man hunkered down beside the groom.

"That is the bride's father," Kutti explained. "He and the bridegroom will use the time from now until the bride appears to get to know each other. They may never have met before to-day. They will no doubt discuss money matters."

From the rate of their conversation, I should guess that the Indian husband has precious little reason to be scared of father-in-law trouble. The silk merchant who was parting with his fifteen-year-old daughter, and the young man who was acquiring her, exchanged about three sentences. And so they sat, side by side, until two women led in the heavily-veiled bride and guided her to a cushion facing the groom.

The priest was a gorgeous figure in his spectacles and dhoti. Now, I thought, the ceaseless ebb and flow of people, the chattering like feeding-time at the zoo, the brazen burgeoning of the band, all would be stilled for the religious part of the ceremony.

How little I knew! Although we sat within a few feet of the principal figures, it was impossible to hear a sound from the priest's rapidly-moving lips.

"What's he saying?" I asked out of sheer curiosity.

Kutti threw out his hands despairingly. "How should I know? He's reading in Sanskrit."

"Do the priests use Sanskrit among themselves, then, as higher officials of the Roman Catholic Church use Latin?"

"Oh no," yawned Kutti. "Most of them don't understand it themselves. They learn the words off by heart for these occasions. But I can't tell you much about the rituals of this ceremony. Weddings in Madras are different."

"But aren't you a Hindu, too?"

"Yes," he said grudgingly, "but all groups don't follow quite the same marriage procedure."

"Well, what is the significance of the twisted scarf?" I persisted, as the priest twined a length of cord-like cloth about the necks of the young couple sitting statue-like, face to face.

"That? Oh, that is like putting the yoke on a pair of oxen when they are old enough to pull the plough."

A friend of the family escorted us from our seats to be introduced to the bride's father and other squatting relatives on the dais. Photographers discharged flash-bulbs. More refreshments were handed round. Family gossip and the current price of silk were discussed. Newcomers wandered in and out and did everything except play jumping games over the rope between the two who were being married. And all the time the musicians in the adjoining room thumped and blew as if their lives depended on each note. Bride and groom in turn stirred a cup of milk with a silver coin. Tiny dishes of spices and sweetmeats were placed on the floor between them. Nobody would, or could, tell me why.

For no special reason that was immediately apparent, the face-covered bride was helped to her feet and led away while the bored young man shifted heavily to a decorated chair beside the platform.

Much of the ceremony was still to come, at the later stages of which the bride would be brought back to assist.

But numbed by the constant uproar, I was content to escape, still wondering where in that orgy of food and noise one was expected to find evidence of the deep spirituality which is supposed to set the Indian apart from the crude and uncultured Occidental.

## CHAPTER II

### ELUSIVE ECONOMICS

IN ordinary lands, economics are factual to the point of dullness. The facts and figures may frequently conceal drama but the camouflage is so highly effective that no one who has not a key to the language of the science is likely to discern the exciting phase in the life history of a country which may lie in a page of statistics.

In the old days the same was true of India. All that was ever heard of economics was of a highly technical nature. It was compiled by economists in the jargon affected by practitioners of the art, for the perusal of other economists.

That has all been changed by independence. "Elementary economics for every man" might well be one of the slogans of the new India, to judge by the freedom with which the subject of India's resources and potentialities are discussed. Issues of food production, industrialisation, developments of every kind, and the fruits thereof, are aired and argued by all classes from Cabinet Ministers to cab drivers. It is a pity that the economics are commonly so elementary as to be virtually non-existent in the normal sense of the term.

Any place in the world where one may go, one hears strange opinions advanced by amateur economists. In some cases they are even wider of the mark than the predictions of the professionals. But as a rule, the amateur enthusiasts fill their ranks from those who do not deal in facts and figures as their means of livelihood. Indian economic theorists are not handicapped in that fashion. They include businessmen who should, by all rules, base their calculations on ascertainable data. In fact, politicians,

journalists, industrialists, bearers and bheesties alike appear to rest their economic beliefs upon faith, hope, and charity.

From the outside looking in, there seems little justification for rejoicing about Indian economy. For many years the combined cereal resources of the areas which now form India and Pakistan have been far below the requirements of the territory ; and the deficit was on the basis of a standard of diet a long way below what might be considered satisfactory. Partition weakened India's situation still further since the new state of Pakistan is composed of regions which used to be more than self-sufficient. It is true that they have not retained that attribute since the split, but that is another matter. It does not in the least affect the very obvious fact that India is a grain deficit area, which is an unhealthy state of affairs for a country which is predominantly agricultural.

In the past, exports of oils, fats, and hides figured large in the country's trade balance. These have now shrunk to almost vanishing point.

On the face of it, those three examples of changed circumstances would in themselves enjoin a cautious approach to consideration of the financial future. When, in addition, a hasty glance at the outgoing column shows that heavy commitments are being entered, many of them involving expenditure which has not yet been worked out, caution might well give way to mild alarm. And above all looms the ominous fact that countless numbers are added to the population each year.

It is rare to find even one of the considerations enumerated figuring in the economic views of Indians. Their faith in the miracle-working properties of independence, hope in the expansion of industry, and charity towards the record, make it possible for them to ignore adverse factors and proceed to economic visions unclouded by cumulus statistics.

Mr. Sharma was an acquaintance rather than a friend—a stimulating and refreshing acquaintance—and a wonderful illustration of the Ethereal School of Economics.

He seemed the last person in the world likely to indulge in wishful thinking. In most respects he could be taken as a representative of the modern Hindu. Short, stocky, and smiling, he was neither aggressive nor apologetic. He was proprietor of one prosperous mercantile concern and had interests in other businesses, especially in films. He had been educated in England as well as in his native land. In his manner and approach to most problems he might have been any businessman from any country.

It was something of a shock to find that his wife belonged to another world. While her husband talked easily and eagerly in English she looked on, grinning. She could do no other, since she knew no language but her own. At the cinema to which he took a small party for a showing of a highly successful film in which he had a big financial interest, he had so arranged the seating that she would sit next to the aisle lest a strange man might repose beside her.

The film we had gone to see was preceded, as invariably happens, by innumerable advertising slides; so everyone used this time to chat. Conversation ranged over a variety of topics before it reached the subject of the future opening out for the new India.

"We have initiative now," declared Mr. Sharma, "and we shall go ahead to build up industry in all its branches. We have real incentive and drive to-day. We are working for the good of our own country and not for the benefit of the British Raj who were the only ones to get good jobs in the old days. Is it any wonder that we Indians were lethargic and had little interest under those conditions? Only the British and other white men got good salaries. We Indians were given no responsibility."

His question was clearly rhetorical, and as a guest it did not seem right to point out that even under the British Raj

the Indian Civil Service was overwhelmingly Indian. Nor would it have been either gracious or necessary to enter into argument about industrial developments. But I could hardly help thinking of the fortunes made by Indians in the cotton and jute trades, to mention but two, or the fantastically wealthy and powerful Tata combine built up in the days before independence was even in sight.

In his own mind, Mr. Sharma had obliterated such occurrences as incompatible with the thesis that a new heaven and a new earth were created on the day that India became in law, as well as in practice, full mistress of her own destiny.

The same outlook was still more vividly betrayed after the main film was over.

I had been apprehensive when accepting his invitation to the cinema. I had seen Indian films before, and had been secretly dismayed at the thought of sitting through a performance scheduled to last for three hours. My memories of past experiences did not encourage me to expect enjoyment; for in their prentice period Indian film producers turned out epics whose principal achievement was that they could be shown without causing an infuriated mob to burn down the cinemas which hired them. One did not, in those days, need to know a word of the language to spot the hero the instant he made his appearance. As soon as he walked on to his first scene, the cameras tracked in for a close-up in which the face occupied the entire screen. The hero responded by opening his mouth so wide that any doctor in the audience could write a spot diagnosis on the state of his tonsils; and an earsplitting volume of sound strained the output of the loudspeakers to their enormous capacity.

Much to my astonishment, I found that the latest effort held my attention throughout. But for the handicap of language and length, it could have been screened with success almost anywhere in the East. Photography was excellent, actors were convincing in their movements, cutting skilful,

and the general technique rather better than Hollywood has displayed in some much-trumpeted offerings that I have seen in recent months.

I expressed these views to Mr. Sharma as we left the cinema. "Ah, I'm so glad you enjoyed it," he replied. "It is a good film, isn't it?"

"It is indeed. To tell you the truth, it was so much better than I expected that I find it absolutely amazing."

He beamed. "You see what we can do when we have the incentive? It is a good picture because it has been made by free people. Producers, actors, cameramen, everybody connected with it had the right spirit and could give of their best."

"So you think that the changed political scene has affected films?" I asked dubiously.

"Of course. It has affected everything. The government is going to set up a network of health clinics throughout the country. That will raise the standard of health and the masses will be able to work harder. They already have the readiness, and the improved health service will give them the physical ability as well. And in other fields, like the film industry, the arts, and many others where physical handicaps have not been among the limiting factors, you will see us forge ahead in the next five or ten years."

"All because of independence?"

"All." His comprehensive gesture imperilled anyone within several feet on either side. "Every gate is now open. Every barrier is down. All classes are united in working for the good of the country. It is a privilege to be alive at this hour—the rebirth of our land. For the first time in two centuries there is an outlet for the genius, the organising skill, the creative thinking, the will to public service."

"I can see that the scope in innumerable respects has been immensely widened, but surely there was some outlet, even before independence, for those who were fortunate enough to be wealthy. Quite apart from the talents they



showed in amassing their fortunes, they could surely have found opportunities for service and self-expression in providing schools and hospitals, or acting as patrons to artists."

"No, no," he expostulated indignantly. "Who would have got the credit for any good they would have done? The British. They were the rulers and would have been credited in the eyes of the world with anything wise, or good, or generous that was done in India. It is only now, when all the credit will come to India, that her sons can give freely of their brains, their treasures, and if need be, their lifeblood."

His enthusiasm and sincerity were so overwhelming that, while I was still in his company, his reasoning seemed conclusive. It was only later that it occurred to me that if his view of the past was right, his forecast for the future could hardly fail to be wrong.

Mr. Sharma was convinced that India would become a great power within the next few years. The main foundation for that conviction was that all industry would flourish as never before, under the influence of an immense upsurge of selfless striving and classless unity of endeavour. It is a beautiful idea. A country with such motivation could scarcely avoid attaining a position of great and deserved prominence in the world. It might well qualify to proffer spiritual and moral leadership to other nations.

Away from the swift enthusiasm of Mr. Sharma, his vision began to look a shade out of focus. The great wave of vigour and righteousness, and of striving only for the common good and the prosperity of the nation, was to arise in the hearts of all Indians. That includes, and by the nature of things, must include, primarily, the wealthy. But by Mr. Sharma's own account, they had in the past abstained from service to their fellow-countrymen because, as he put it, "all the credit in the eyes of the world would have gone to the British."

In other words, the very claim that the presence of an alien ruler had prevented those Indians, who were in a strong position to help their fellows, from doing so was, *ipso facto*, evidence against their possession of the attributes on which the dream of a roseate dawn was moulded. He had said, by implication, that to acquire merit was not enough ; that his countrymen were not interested in storing up "treasure in heaven" or in altruistic service. Had it been otherwise, there would have been no question of withholding comfort for the sick and encouragement for seekers after knowledge and beauty, lest others should receive the acclaim of the world for the good achieved. And if one class could thus be proved void of the virtues so warmly ascribed to the entire body politic, it seemed at best doubtful whether other groups of the community would prove vastly different.

On reflection, Mr. Sharma's reasons for the tremendous improvement in the standards of Indian film-making seem less likely to be the real reasons. It appears highly probable that having attracted more capital and having emerged from the experimental stage, the Indian studios are simply better equipped, better staffed, and have more "know-how" than they had in the past. The creative artist, if genuine, is not conditioned by politics, economics, or any other material consideration. His life-force, and therefore his work, comes from within. And the technical men, if they are any good at all, delight in craftsmanship in the writing of a script which will give value to the efforts of the technicians. One nor the other is concerned with nationalism or political development, so long as these factors do not interfere.

Proof that the dream of inspired unity among all Indians is merely a pipe-dream is not hard to find. Here, as elsewhere, the surest pointer of the barometer to what is going on is the converse of ministerial pronouncements ; and the pointer is certainly not at "Set Fair." No solitary member

of the government mentions the subject of economics without uttering a fervent appeal for better relations between workers and employers. From time to time the speeches also contain reminders that production, whether from factory or from field, is what matters.

All classes, creeds, and conditions of Indians can undoubtedly be lined up together ; but the number of subjects on which that feat can be performed has been shrinking steadily ever since the British handed over. If French and Portuguese India duly become part of the Indian Republic, the last lever for temporarily ironing out differences will have vanished. A really astute national leader ought to arrange for some section of the sacred soil to remain under alien control, preferably with guarantees from the United Nations to avert danger of warlike action upsetting the apple-cart, so that he could still retain a rallying cry against increasing internal tensions, particularly in the economic field.

Some pretty strong glue is going to be badly needed if capital and labour are not to drift into a clash which will wreck the ambitious aims of the Congress leaders.

As far as one can deduce from published statements and from the trend of events, India sees herself as taking over from Japan as the workshop of Asia. Industry is slated to provide an enhanced standard of life. Of course, there is to be a big drive to restore land which has gone out of cultivation and to bring into use great acreages which have been unproductive up to the present day. But food-crop boosting is needed to provide the minimum of rice ; it is the role of industries to supply the dried fish to go with the rice.

Plans for raising food production are bold and imaginative.

Gogu of the glittering eye and the quick impatience of the modern Indian was my instructor on the scope and value of the developments envisaged.

A query, almost casual, on what was to be done to overcome the chronic shortages of food endemic throughout the country, started him off.

"We will cure all that," he assured me. "It will take a few years, but when all the government's schemes are in full working order, India will be able to feed herself again."

"Again?" I prompted gently.

"Yes, yes, yes, yes. Again," he exclaimed. "India was rich and prosperous before she was conquered."

"Before which conquest, Gogu? Pre-Dravidian or post-Moghul?"

As I spoke, I wondered if he would be offended. Fortunately, in the intensity of his own emotions, he completely missed the implications of the question and swept on, "Post-Moghul. The British. They did nothing for the country except create a police force to hold her in subjection, and build railways so that they could carry away her wealth. We have great stretches of fertile land they neglected and allowed to go to waste. Now they will blossom again."

He reeled off lists of projects for irrigation and hydro-electric systems, with the hectares of land each was estimated to make available for food production and cash crops. As he elaborated on details of the programmes, I found time to wonder why, if the British were in India only for what they could get out of it, they did not bring all this valuable land into use and so get still more.

Later the same week I cornered Bharat. "What are your views on the land development plans?" I asked.

He shrugged. "They are inevitable. We have two courses open to us—no, three. We can grow enough food to feed ourselves, and that would mean bringing hundreds of thousands of acres now useless into service. We can continue to supplement domestic crops by imports if we can sell enough raw material and manufactured produce abroad to pay for the imports. If we can't achieve either of those

ends, we can allow half the population to die of starvation and solve the problem that way. There are no other answers."

"But do you think that these plans are practicable?"

"Who can truly tell until they've been tried?" he answered question with question. "How can anyone tell accurately what the yield from a desert may be if it ceases to be a desert?"

I tried again. "Do you believe that irrigation and similar means will bring the area under crops high enough to support India's entire population?"

"No," he replied emphatically, "but it will undoubtedly ease the situation, and make our economic position correspondingly sounder."

"Would you agree that the British are to blame for the shortage of home-grown food?"

Bharat laughed. "That is rubbish."

"Yet it is true that your new government, the government of free India, is planning to increase the area of cultivatable land immensely and to introduce modern farming methods."

"That is so," he assented, "but I for one have no doubt that the British would have done the same in time. They are not fools as some of my countrymen seem to imagine. It didn't suit the Britisher's book to have India impoverished and hungry. Indeed, in the last decade the British had better reason than anyone else in the world to want to see India prosper. By that time, we were making all the cheap cotton fabric and other mass-consumed goods we needed in our own mills and factories, and India had become, as far as Britain was concerned, a market for top quality goods as well."

"In that case, what do you suggest as the explanation for the incontrovertible fact that all these new projects are being advanced for the first time by the present government?"

"Sterling balance," said Bharat, with a sudden and wicked grin. "What is the proverb again about 'an ill wind'?"

"It's an ill wind that blows nobody good," I submitted.

"That's it," Bharat agreed. "We have rewritten that. The New Delhi version is 'It's an ill war that does nobody good'."

He certainly put his finger on the spot. I guess it is a pretty tender spot for both parties. It must make the British wince every time anyone mentions the enormous amounts they have undertaken to pay back to India for supplies and services provided for the war against Japan. And it must almost equally injure the *amour-propre* of the more extreme Indian nationalists to be reminded to how large an extent their independence is being subsidised by the British. To save face, they will tell themselves, and anyone else within earshot, that it is a debt which ought to be discharged quicker and that Britain's failure to liquidate it at higher speed is another grave injustice to India. It can be from no other motive, unless ignorance. One need not be a financial genius to figure it out that India did pretty darned well out of the deal—not if one happened to be in India during the last war and saw what went on ; and how prices soared as soon as the Allied Armies were in need of supplies of a particular type. One began to wonder who was supposed to be exploiting whom !

However, that is an old debate, and its revival to-day could do nothing but rouse ill-feeling. India has the sterling balances and they are proving invaluable for the provision of equipment for the big plans laid down by her government. They will also be useful in helping India to get the new plant wanted for expansion of industry. But since the British Government will agree to the release of sterling balances only at carefully-phased intervals, and in limited amounts, more money, and big money, is wanted to carry out this expansion. Even the simplest and cheapest aspect of the programme is going to call for fairly heavy capital investment, apart altogether from running costs and incidental expenditures.

Big-scale irrigation and hydro-electric works will absorb funds at a fantastic pace but reclamation of weed-grown land by use of tractors should work out relatively cheap. It is estimated that for the full target for the next seven years, the Central Government will have to provide a stock of a thousand heavy tractors and ten thousand light ones. That would enable provincial authorities, working on compact blocks of ten thousand acres at a time, to reclaim and cultivate a total of six million acres.

A small start was made last year. In the Central Provinces, some eight thousand acres of weed-covered land were cleared and planted down to cereals. Results were good.

Up to the present, nobody seems to have raised the bogey of erosion as a possible consequence of mechanical cultivation. Which seems more than odd. Even with normal, peasant methods of cultivation, wind erosion is considerable. Anyone who doubts that fact need not bother to establish a high-powered, research set-up to verify it. All he needs is a high-powered car to show how the top soil turns to dust in the dry season and whirls into the air with the slightest breeze.

On second thought, the car is unnecessary. A bicycle would give ample evidence. From personal experience during my early days in India, I can recommend the ride from Bombay to Agra in the month of May. A rumble of bullock carts passing across the landscape raised a red cloud so thick as to put to shame for impenetrability the traditional London "pea-souper."

That degree of volatility of the top soil was achieved with normal Indian methods of cultivation. In case there should be any misapprehension as to the nature of those methods, it may be worth recording them briefly. A bullock, or yoke of bullocks, pulls across the surface of the tiny strip, which represents the average peasant holding, a branch of a tree shaped into a rough plough. If the farmer is very progressive, the coulter may have a small scrap of iron affixed to it; but that is exceptional. If he is very poor, the motive power

is provided by his wife. In either case, the result is a series of shallow scratches on the surface of the earth.

What will happen when tractors pull real ploughs through the soil instead of over it defies imagining.

Such difficulties have undoubtedly not been overlooked by the men of the Department of Agriculture ; but there is a possibility that political pressure and the serious shortage of senior staff may have resulted in their being given less than their proper weight.

The problems of increasing agricultural yields will be tough ; but in the long run they will probably be a great deal more amendable than those of stepping up industrial output at the pace that most of vocal India seems to expect.

Pandit Nehru does not suffer from any illusions on that score. In March 1949 he told a gathering of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce, at the Imperial Hotel in Delhi, " I am quite convinced that the food problem is not a difficult one, but we have made it difficult. Perhaps the ease with which we can get our foodstuffs from abroad has prevented us from facing the problem appropriately. Let us make up our minds to live on the food we produce or die in the attempt."

At the same meeting he affirmed in unmistakable terms that the Government of the new India did not intend to import any food after the next two years, no matter what happened, and even if people died.

If anyone should have lingering doubts about the advantages of independence, that statement should dispel them. What Imperial power of modern days would have dared to proclaim or dream of implementing so daring a programme ? Not that the Prime Minister is likely to carry out his threat if the situation is really critical when the appointed hour strikes. He knows too well that empty bellies make a loud noise, and that noise is a strong stimulant of violence. As violence has been endemic in the new India since the initial, horrifying waves of mass murder swept through the land



at the time of partition, no responsible politician could afford to offer the Communists and other agitators such a heaven-sent seed bed for trouble as would be afforded by famine.

Not long after Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru let off his fire-cracker, the official programme for cultivation to save India from the need to import foodstuffs was released. It was supposed to be adequate for supplying stocks to meet the deficiency by 1951, but it would be a great surprise to most people if it were to do so. Even as a plan, it does not look so good to me. I am no farmer and may not therefore be as well supplied as I should be with accurate information on land needs. All that one can say with certainty is that the projected clearing of wasteland to the tune of 800,000 acres seems likely to meet but a fraction of the deficit of four million tons of food.

Sinking of tube wells, irrigation schemes, import of fertilisers for rice, and other measures are proposed. They should help considerably. Best of all is the scheme, intended to go into action almost at once, for converting some of the acreage at present devoted to surplus crops, to the infinitely more urgent task of growing food. That is a course which could produce results in a hurry. But as one member of the Indian Parliament very reasonably reminded the government at the time, the only effective way of persuading peasants to grow more of a specific crop is to make the alternative food crop at least as attractive financially as the surplus product it is desired to supplant; otherwise the change-over from one crop to another can only be achieved by the use of force.

Taking all aspects of the two-year plan into consideration, it is a very open question whether it will go anywhere near its avowed aim of making India independent of imported foodstuffs. The schemes themselves are drawn on the assumption that the monsoons will be favourable throughout the period. It is an assumption history does not justify.

Hardly a single year has passed without some part of the country suffering from drought and consequent hardship.

Agreeing for the moment that the programme laid down by the Ministry of Agriculture is ambitious enough, the next question is whether it can be carried out in its present form. For example, although it calls for the reclamation of 800,000 acres of wasteland, plans were originally for total reclamation next year of 100,000 acres. If that was a realistic estimate of what could be done with the material in hand, the revised programme is unsound. If, on the other hand, it is possible to carry out the greatly-expanded programme, the drafter of the first plan must have been guilty of something approaching sabotage.

On the subject of irrigation and wells, it is worth noting that the Province of Bombay, the second largest in India, which has an unusually enterprising and energetic local government, has fallen far short of the promise made at the introduction of the five-year plan which has now run half its course. For example, this scheme calls for the sinking each year of ten thousand new irrigation wells. That would mean that at the end of five years the peasants of the Bombay Province should have at their disposal fifty thousand more wells than they had in 1947. In fact, after half the programme period, they are the richer by some four thousand wells.

Throughout Madras and indeed all the provinces, the story so far has been the same. Plans and promises on food production have been admirable; but performance has lagged far behind. No particular reason exists for imagining that a dramatic change has taken place, or is going to take place in the course of the next couple of years. So if India's Prime Minister should by any chance intend his utterance to be taken literally, the prospects for a large section of the country's population are very bleak indeed.

One possible explanation of Nehru's effort to shock his fellow-countrymen into a state of awareness may be found

in some of the curious things that have happened in India since independence. A grave attack of squandermania, induced apparently by the sensation of power conveyed by having money to spend, has had odd results. Not long after the British handed over, so the story goes, the Indians brought in a two-million-dollar shipment of American fountain pens. They were right nice pens, but whoever was responsible for the expenditure of so much of India's dollar exchange on them must have had a brainstorm. By the spring of this year these pens of every colour, make and size, were still cramming the shelves of the bazaar shops all over India. There simply is not a large enough public both literate and solvent enough to absorb so many pens of that type, or any other type.

Another example of irresponsible handling of public funds in the immediate post-independence period was told to me by a European friend. I was convinced that he was engaged on an elaborate leg-pull until his Indian colleague confirmed the truth of the story. It appears that in the first flush of enthusiasm at being free to make purchases where and how they pleased, buyers for the nationalised Indian railways scurried over to the United States and bought a number of magnificent locomotives. They were shiny and resplendent when they were unloaded at the Bombay Docks. They had all the latest gadgets, and must have sent a glow of joy and pride through the veins of the men who bought them—until it was observed that they were too large for the tunnels on Indian railways.

My informants assured me that they have been sitting at the docks ever since, taking up valuable space and deteriorating steadily. The makers naturally are not interested in having them back, and the Government of India has not so far found any other railway anxious to acquire those latterday "white elephants." The story was told to me on the eve of my departure from India. That was a matter which gave me regret. I wanted to see those locomotives !

If a visitor finds, without seeking, two such cases of crazy buying, it is legitimate to take it for granted that India's leaders must have become aware of many more of the same kind. It would not, therefore, be at all surprising if they chose to adopt the most drastic methods in their efforts to shake some sense of reality into the heads of their compatriots.

One more novel development in the new India, as far as economics are concerned, is the decision of the government to introduce a complete ban on the slaughter of cattle except those over fourteen years of age or which are unable to work or breed by reason of age, injury, or deformity. They have so far delayed a decision, on the recommendation of an official committee, that a total ban should be placed upon the slaughter of cattle, irrespective of age. The committee suggested that, "The law for prohibiting slaughter of cattle totally should be enforced as early as possible but in any case within two years of enactment of legislation, during which period arrangements should be made for the maintenance and care of unserviceable and unproductive animals."

In announcing the decision to the Legislative Assembly, the Minister of Food and Agriculture said that the prosperity of India, to a very large extent, depended upon cattle, and the soul of the country could feel satisfied only if the slaughter of cattle was banned completely and simultaneous steps taken to improve cattle which were in a deplorable condition.

One has always been clearly aware that the cow is a sacred animal to the Hindus. The fact is kept continually before one's eyes by the presence of unattended cattle ambling blandly through city streets and busy intersections. Now they are to become more sacred than ever, with security from birth, to natural death from old age. It is some comfort to those, like myself, who have never been able to conjure up any real affection for the beasts, that though more

sacred they will also be less privileged. Most of the larger cities and towns are working on plans to restrict the wanderings of cattle in the main streets and bazaars.

The next logical step would be to ban the sale of cowhides. But perhaps it is only the soul of the cow which is sacred. In that case, the new laws should not unduly affect India's valuable export of hides. Eighty per cent of the twenty million cattle hides that the country has produced each year have been derived from animals which have died a natural death.

Indeed, if the project for turning India into a rest home for aged and indigent cows is accompanied by effective measures to improve the conditions in which they are kept, the supply of hides might easily rise to new heights. It is reliably reported that ninety per cent of the calves born in some parts of India die in early youth, mostly of starvation. So an improvement in their conditions might send the total numbers well above the figure of 110 millions given at the last animal census. It might also result in an increase in the milk yield of Indian cattle to a level which could furnish an important addition to the rationed and badly-balanced diet of the vast majority of India's peoples.

Despite the new slaughter regulations, however, and the religious beliefs in the sacred qualities of the cow, some "unworthy" Hindus have already introduced a profitable Black Market for the sale of beef to non-vegetarian groups in India.

A long, two-column editorial that appeared in a popular and widely-circulated Indian newspaper only a few months ago touched on the facts and figures pertaining to the overall, economic picture in relation to sterling and dollar balances as regards imports and exports. It did not mince matters when it said in part, "Authority itself has not yet shown itself capable of producing either the requisite economic understanding or the leadership which will be able to demand top priority for economic issues. A far greater

degree of direction of economic policy and less so-called planning for the future development of existing industries is urgently needed and in this matter, as in so many others, there must be co-operation between the Centre and the Provinces. An immediate programme necessary to bring the country back to trade equilibrium would involve a substantial expansion of exports, a curtailment and revision of imports so as to make a better use of the dwindling sterling balances, disinflation of prices and costs, a real Budgetary balance if not a surplus at the Centre as well as in the Provinces, and a system of trade and physical controls that will effect the most productive distribution of essential materials. To achieve such a programme Government will need to overhaul their economic policy and administration, assisted by far more factual intelligence and analysis than is made available at present."

Such editorials and articles are appearing every day in the leading papers of the country. So it is at least encouraging to note that there is a freedom of the press in the new India, as regards domestic economics and all other controversial subjects, especially since the new Indian Republic is strictly governed by only one official party.

## CHAPTER III

### THE WAKENING SEX

THE chief difference between a woman and a mule, in the outlook of millions of Indian men, is that the mule is much more likely to kick ; and, of course, if it does kick, it kicks harder. It will take more than a revolution of a few world wars to alter that. From the beginning of time, or a fair way back towards then, women have had a shoddy deal in India. They have been the bearers of burdens, and children—preferably the largest possible number of both.

A new movement is now astir in India. So far, it affects only a small minority ; but the significant feature of that minority is that it is composed largely of what might fairly be termed the upper middle-class women, who were traditionally more shut off from the world than any other group. They escaped the public humiliation which was, and is, the daily lot of the wives and daughters of peasants and labourers ; they were also secluded from the lively communal jesting and banter that the lower-class women know so well how to enjoy.

As a feminist, it has made me inexpressibly angry at times to see men striding along a dusty road, encumbered by nothing more burdensome than a "bidi," as they call their pungent cigarettes, while behind them, full ankle-length skirts swirling like dull flames to the rapid beat of their bare feet, came the women of the party, laden down with hoes and other implements. Often they carried children on their backs, and brass jugs of water on their heads. Sometimes an undersized infant would lie cradled in a fold of cotton rags, feeding at the breast while the mother pattered along with the rest, in that half-trot which eats up the miles.

For decades to come, visitors to India will probably see much the same picture, at dawn or dusk, as work gangs move to or from their tasks. Those women, and the others who stand in the muddy, rocky streams intent upon beating the buttons off men's shirts and the substance out of anything given to them for dhobyng, will not feel the effects of the feministic change that is now beginning to make itself noticeable. But emancipation is not a doctrine which can be nibbled at like a stick of rock candy, and replaced on the table until it is desired again. It is a virus. Once it has established itself, it will riot from one section of the community to another, heeding not at all the artificial barriers created by differences in income.

The women who are to-day showing signs of taking their rightful place alongside the men of India, come from families in which in the fairly recent past the womenfolk had no existence outside their homes. They were sheltered from knowledge of the world in their father's house ; had a single glimpse of the crowded life when they were married ; and vanished again into obscurity to wait patiently the pleasure of their husbands.

In the short period since India became a sovereign nation, the process of disrupting the old taboos upon entry into public affairs has moved forward at unprecedented speed. It came as a complete surprise to me this year to find Indian women as customs officers, air hostesses, bus conductors, as well as in the field of journalism, welfare work and high governmental employment. Even more surprising is the variety of voluntary jobs that are being undertaken by women's clubs and groups. They tackle anything—refugees, work for hospitals, schools for the poorest of the poor ; all these are problems of the kind which are being dealt with largely by voluntary efforts on the part of women's organisations.

I commented on the change to Umba, plump, cheerful, and unmilitant in flowered silk sari. " You'll soon win women



their equality if you carry on at the present pace," I suggested. "I realise fully well what a tremendous task it'll be to overcome the resistance of menfolk who have been accustomed to ruling the roast in exclusively male interests for generation after generation."

"We still have so much to do," Umba smiled apologetically. "You see, the total membership of all women's organisations in India is only a tiny fraction of the number of women in India. For those outside one or other of the groups, there is so little we can do."

"Do you think the movement will eventually spread to all parts of the country, and to all ranks in society?" I asked.

"Oh yes," she replied unhesitatingly.

"That would make life better for succeeding generations, wouldn't it?"

"We hope so," Umba smiled. "But I do hope you haven't taken too seriously all that's been said and written about the lot of our women in the past. Much of it has been true, of course. Women haven't been allowed to play the part they should play in national life, and their private lives have been ridiculously circumscribed in many cases. All that is true, I admit. It is a fact that in theory we've been subjected to the will of the man throughout our lives, but you can believe me that in a great many cases it has been in theory only."

"Now, don't give me the old yarn of a clever woman always being able to get her own way with a man," I laughed. "I know all about that, and I know that it's quite accurate. But isn't that just the sort of unpleasant subterfuge that modern women want to be able to discard? Don't we aim at meeting our men as equals?"

My friend assented gravely, "I agree with all you say. I wasn't going to infer that we have in the past had our way by guile. That is probably what happened in a great many cases, but it wasn't of that I was thinking."

"Don't tell me that the curry-pestle has been known to play the part traditionally assigned to the rolling-pin," I chuckled.

"Now, you're making fun of me, Dorothy," Umba protested. "How shall I explain it all to you? The old saying was that the girl obeyed her father until he passed his authority to her husband; and that if the husband died before her, the son became the master. It was, perhaps, generally true, but always there were women, especially older women, who had minds and wills of their own. They did not become slaves to their husbands, and still less to their sons. When it was commoner than it is now for men to take several wives, the number one wife frequently enjoyed an independence and an authority over the household that Western women might well have regarded with awe. That happened in all classes. My grandmother was the real master of our home before my grandfather died, and later she had the last word in everything with my father and the rest of the family."

"But wasn't that exceptional?" I demanded. "Wasn't she the solitary instance needed to prove the rule?"

"Oh no," said Umba, shaking her head. "You'd be surprised to find how often the same sort of thing took place. Why, in some of the villages it was, and still is, so frequent and so marked that it has developed into what amounts to a matriarchial system."

"I can't say that I've seen much sign of it," I commented wryly. "Wherever I've been in the country districts it has looked to me as if the women were getting a raw deal, and treated more like slaves than rightful members of a household."

"As far as the majority are concerned, you are right," Umba agreed. "A woman has virtually always had to wait until she was growing old to acquire a say in family or community matters; and even when no question of purdah arose, she has had very little opportunity of contact with

those outside the immediate family group, and virtually no hope of outside interests. 'That is what we are trying to alter.'

In the course of my recent stay in India, first-class glimpses of the process of alteration were granted to me at various gatherings of women's societies.

One of the most striking instances was at the annual conference of the Bombay Presidency Women's Council that I attended on behalf of the American Women's Club of Bombay which donates over fifty thousand rupees per year to worthy Indian charities. Even the printed programme came as a shock, with its list of the twenty-eight organisations associated in the work of the council without distinction of religion or politics. The proceedings were a still bigger surprise, for despite the fact that I knew the council had been in operation for thirty years, I did not expect so large a gathering of delegates from all over the province, or such a high standard to be maintained in the conduct of the business of the conference. Not a few public bodies in the United States could have learned something from the keen attention that the delegates paid to the addresses and lectures throughout the four day sessions.

In many respects, indeed in most, proceedings were very similar to those of such occasions in other countries. The main difference was that the delegates were vastly more decorative than at other women's conferences I have attended. That is where Indian women have an unfair advantage. They are born with a natural aptitude for wearing the sari and an over-abundance of jewellery. The former is undoubtedly a gift. Some American and British women living in India have been fascinated by the glorious materials used for saris, often woven with pure gold and silver threads, and by their flowing grace; so, many have adopted the dress for evening wear. One or two are reputed to have done so successfully. I wouldn't know. All I can say is that most of those I have witnessed making the attempt

would have been wiser not to ; though not all were so unfortunate as the European lady in an Agra hotel who caused the comment, in a male voice, " Well, nobody could say that she looks like a sack tied in the middle. Who ever heard of making a sack out of a bit of silk like that ! "

Fortunately for my peace of mind, the bulk of the proceedings was conducted in English. One Indian woman after another, Hindu, Parsee, Christian, went to the microphone and expressed themselves with clarity and assurance on the problems of the day in relation to women and children. At the inaugural ceremony, there was only one exception to the predominance of the English language. The Ranisaheb of Phalton read her opening address in English and then explained that she had been asked to give impressions of her recent trip to America. To my chagrin, she went on to do so in Marathi, one of the two-hundred-odd languages of India, of which I understand not a word. Judging by the appreciative chuckles from the delegates, or at least a section of them, it was a loss. At the same time it was an admirable illustration of the reason for the common use of English ; for it transpired in conversation later on that the majority of the Indian women there knew as little of what she had said about America as I did.

There were a few government officials and reporters in the audience at that opening session, but the only man on the platform was the Right Reverend Dr. Gracias, resplendent in a long white robe, a dark pink sash and bright pink socks. His speech was one which might have been delivered in any country where women have held equality with men for generations. By shutting one's eyes to obscure the vision of the lean Goanese figure, unusually tall, but otherwise typically Indian, it was easy to imagine that one had been transported by supernatural means to a gathering in the Middle West, and was listening to light-hearted anecdotes from a visiting church dignitary there on the superior common sense of women.

Undoubtedly women's movements in India so far are almost entirely supported and organised by the few who have absorbed Western ideas. That is not to say that they are all Westernised. Adapted, rather than adopted, is the right word to employ for their usage of conceptions that have sprung up in Indian soil from seed from the West. For all that, they are not really representative of their sex throughout the country; they are symptomatic of awakening, and their significance lies in the fact that they themselves are well aware of the immensity of the tasks which lie ahead.

Early this year, the President of the All-India Women's Conference underlined that awareness when she declared, "We must think in terms of those millions of ignorant, dumb women who live not in cities but in far-off corners of India, who dress not as we dress, and talk not the language we talk."

Two major problems that the politically-conscious Indian women think and talk about are those of illiteracy and population. Both subjects are sure to give them scope for all their energies for years ahead. The lingering tendency in the West to regard the education of girls as a matter of less importance than the education of boys is as nothing to the prejudice in India. As for the population headache, it is only surprising that Indian women can be found bold enough to advocate the limitation of families.

Babies are an annual event in Indian family life, like any other crop. In past centuries the average expectation of life was so low, because of the absence of hygiene and the ravages of disease of every kind, to say nothing of famines, that the rate of production was cancelled out. Nowadays, with the gradual development of public health services begun under British rule, and the obvious determination of the new government to maintain and improve upon the standards attained, it has become a matter of the most urgent moment.

The women's organisations plan to tackle the question with gusto. They are assuming a burden that only the most courageous would attempt to shoulder. Against them is massed the solid weight of tradition, custom, religion and mental outlook, ingrained for thousands of years. And in addition to all that, there is the handicap of trying to put a message across to the millions who would have difficulty in comprehending the new teaching even if they could be persuaded to listen.

Just how difficult the problem is going to be with the ninety and nine out of every hundred does not bear thinking about. The odd one per cent who are well enough educated to be regarded as reasonably hopeful subjects for conversion look like being trouble enough.

Lakshmi is a fair example of what the reformers will have to cope with. She is young, well-educated, and by no means stupid. But she still does not speak the same language, in the metaphorical sense, as the progressive elements of the various women's societies.

Our first meeting was in a Bombay street. An English friend whom I had been shopping with stopped to speak to Lakshmi. She had just introduced us when she was buttonholed by someone else, so Lakshmi and I were left in each other's company, neither of us having the remotest idea as to the other's interests. Conversation appeared likely to become sticky. However, Lakshmi was carrying a minute replica of herself who surveyed the world with immense dark eyes, so, basing my calculations on the youthfulness of the mother, I hazarded, "Is that your first baby?"

"Oh, no," said Lakshmi in what can only be described as tones of horror. "Oh no. I have been married for seven years now."

"How many children have you, then?"

"This is my fourth."

That statement made me gasp. "It doesn't seem possible," I protested. "You look so young that I find it hard to believe that you can possibly have three older than your baby. How old are the others?"

"Six, five, and four," came the answer, followed almost immediately by the apologetic explanation, "You see, my husband was away for nearly two years on post-graduate studies just after our last son was born."

Afterwards I enquired from my friend as to the profession which had taken Lakshmi's husband out of the country for two years on post-graduate studies—and learned he was a doctor.

Lakshmi's attitude is not unusual. Indeed it represents the norm for Hindu women of all castes, as far as I can make out. Those who think in terms of family control and limitation are the abnormalities of their society; they are beginning to take an interest in contraceptives, whereas their myriad sisters are still much more liable to be customers of the vendors of aphrodisiacs.

Even with the aid of an Indian interpreter whose ability to meet the lowliest on their own verbal ground was undisputed, it proved utterly impossible to extract any views on birth control from women in the bazaar sections of a major city or surrounding country villages. They simply did not know what we were talking about, and in most cases our attempts to explain made no impression at all. It would have been quite as sensible and profitable to have asked them their views on snowballing, in districts where the temperature never falls within thirty degrees of freezing.

Only one woman of the many we approached gave evidence of having grasped the essentials of the subject on which she was being questioned. She gleaned that someone was suggesting that she might not have any more children, and burst forth into an impassioned tirade which culminated in gestures so emphatic that the interpreter had

no need whatsoever to whisper me hurried advice to retreat. She was too late. Her whisper fell short of me by yards. When she caught up with me, she explained that the first signs of wrath were caused by the worthy villager gaining the impression that it was being suggested that she had already passed the years of child-bearing. In an effort to pacify her upon that count, the unfortunate interpreter must have chosen her words without sufficient thought ; for the flare-up which supervened almost immediately made it perfectly clear that the victim of our personal poll regarded us as having admitted that we were in league to cast upon her a spell to render her barren, and so shame her in the eyes of her husband, her neighbours, and the entire countryside.

Krishna, one of the manifestations of the Brahma-Siva-Vishnu trinity of Hinduism, is one of the root causes of over-population. Marital relations are an act of worship to him. Since failure of such relations to result in the production of children at the minimum intervals would lay a woman open to the reproach of being barren—a stigma to be avoided at any cost—any interference with the natural cycle is certain to meet with the bitterest opposition.

In their uphill fight to enhance the prestige and position of their own sex, the enlightened handful of the new India are lucky to have the vigorous and outspoken support of many of the important men at the head of the government. Pandit Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, other prominent figures of the Congress Party, and those Princes who have climbed upon the Nationalist band-waggon, have repeatedly gone on record as endorsing the need for greater participation of women in public life. The new Hindu Code Bill will give women vastly improved rights in marriage and divorce matters, and in the ownership of property. From being chattels, Indian women are gradually acquiring a legal right to be individuals and to act for themselves.



Transforming the legal rights into practice may take generations as far as the masses are concerned. But it would be rash to say that it will necessarily take a long time. Social changes are developing with such rapidity in the forcing-house atmosphere of independence that anything might happen. There is certainly no lack of confidence that it will be achieved within a few years. The magic passwords, "Now that we are free," is used in relation to the emancipation of women just as it used about everything else in India to-day; as a sort of talisman and pledge that miracles will be wrought at once, and the impossible in a slightly longer time, to bowdlerise one of the war-time clichés.

So far, no one has told me that the subordinate position of women in the Indian social structure has been entirely due to the British. Perhaps no one has thought of that alibi yet; or my Indian friends do me the credit of knowing enough about the history of their country to be inclined to choke if I tried to swallow that story. Of course I have been assured with all solemnity that the abuses of the system would have been removed long ago if it had not been for the dead hand of alien rule. It has also been suggested that the caste system has retained its vigour down through the years because of indirect support from the British Raj. It would not particularly surprise me to hear an Indian proclaim that the British invented the caste system and fastened it upon the unfortunate Indians as a means of sustaining their suzerainty.

This habit of explaining away all shortcomings by reference back to recent history, and ignoring difficulties ahead because of the transfer of sovereignty, may prove an expensive luxury if persisted in. Women, at all events, would be wise not to base their calculations too much upon those twin errors. At the moment, they are supremely confident because they have the support of many of the leading politicians; they are fired by the enthusiasm of

a country reborn ; and they look to dramatic results from the improvement of education.

"Do you think this rapid progress of women in public affairs is merely a phase, or will it last ?" I asked Helen, an English friend who for several years has been, and still is, keenly interested and active in welfare and educational work among the Indians.

"It will last, all right," she retorted crisply. "But it will be uphill work."

"Do you think that there will be a delayed male reaction against the drive ?" I pursued.

"Partly that, and partly the old trouble of lethargy," she sighed. "But most of all, the difficulty of moving the bulk of the women themselves. In some ways we women are infinitely more conservative than men, you know."

"In what ways do you think this conservatism will work in India ?" I persisted.

"Quite simply. Older women will refuse to have anything to do with the new ways and will use all their influences to turn the young away from them as well. The timidity inbred by centuries of tradition will also help the older women to balk against any changes."

"What, then, can be expected to break down the resistance of the older women ?"

"Only one thing," said Helen earnestly, "and that is the collapse of the last remnants of the intricate family system. As it stands now, grandparents, and especially grandmothers, are petty tyrants in a family circle."

"Do you think the old family system will eventually collapse, then, in this country ?"

"I wouldn't care to say how far it has already been undermined by modern ideas," was the reply.

From whatever angle one approaches the subject, the clearer it becomes that the stirrings of Indian women originate in the West and depend for their advancement

on the triumph of Western ideals of womanhood. That is where a danger lurks in the education plans on which the Indian women are building such high hopes. In their efforts to avoid attacks from political groups, the present Ministers and senior officials of the government are forced to try to compile their programme on the lines of what will appear to be of purely domestic devising. It follows that all education schemes will be worked out to look as little like those of Europe and America as possible.

Already voices have been raised to suggest that in secondary education great care should be taken to differentiate between the course of studies for boys and girls. The argument, which will not be unfamiliar elsewhere, is that it is useless and wasteful to clutter up the minds of girls with much of what boys study in the latter part of their scholastic training. These voices insist that while it is desirable that the appallingly low level of literacy among women and girls must be dealt with at the earliest possible moment, "a great deal of matter included in the syllabus had become a fetish and should be eliminated as far as female students are concerned."

There is something rather ominous about the weight of opinion behind this drive to limit the education of women. It is supported by some very prominent and able figures, including a leading Premier who is one of the most important educationists of the country as well as the foremost man of his own immense province. During my recent stay in India, he was reported in the local press as stating publicly, "I am convinced that for a large majority of women the basic craft will be home-making—that is, marriage, care of children, and care of the home as a social and educational centre. They will undoubtedly do other things but their life will mainly revolve round the home."

To my surprise, those sentiments did not provoke any comment. Indian women apparently accepted them

without query. They made me just a little bit nervous—for India. There is not such a great difference between that line of approach and the attitude toward women adopted by the Hitler cult. Women must make the homes, of course. That is natural law. But equally, the calibre of the children from the homes must depend on the intellectual quality and education of the women who make them.

It may be purely concern for the future happiness of young Indian women that the cry of, "Train girls only to improve the standards of our homes," arises. To the friendly foreigner, it has a sound strangely reminiscent of the time-honoured slogan, "A woman's place is in the kitchen."

It is gratifying, however, to find that a trend which began under British rule is being maintained and extended. This year the Legislative Assembly in New Delhi passed a non-official bill raising the marriageable age of girls from fourteen to fifteen. There seems little doubt that the day of the child marriage has ended for ever; but it was somewhat of a shock to find that forty per cent of Indian women are still being married at less than fifteen years of age.

Even to-day, the custom of child marriage dies hard. In the debate which preceded the approval of the bill, one member urged that child marriages should be permitted, with the proviso that consummation of the marriage might be delayed until the children reached the ages prescribed in the bill. He stated that even the present temptations of city life could be overcome if marriages were solemnised during childhood. He stressed his argument by adding that psychologists had also pointed out that child marriages were more conducive to compatibility of temper and mutual affection than marriages between adults, which usually were based on mere physical attraction.

In the United States we figure to achieve the same end

by co-education in the schools and colleges—not by tying two youngsters together before they are old enough to know what is happening to them. But maybe he's right. Maybe it would be a happier world if every boy baby had a girl baby popped into the crib beside him and they were stuck together "till death them do part!"

Quite the most fascinating of the arguments adduced in the Assembly on this subject were those put forward by a Parliament member, Mr. Punjabrao Deshmukh. He had originally been in favour of the said proposals, but in the debate he spoke strongly in favour of retaining fourteen as the marriageable age for girls. He declared that he had changed his mind on the matter after his visit to America. Public opinion in America, he learned, was increasingly favouring early marriages to counteract the alarming number of divorces there and consequent disruption of the home. It had been found, according to him, that if couples married at an advanced age, both the man and woman had "*some past history*"; that after the first flush of love, they began inquiring into each other's past and then the whole trouble in the family started. Letters from home, however, assure me that the programme of "catching them young" has not yet assumed the dimensions that might be imagined from Mr. Punjabrao Deshmukh's arguments.

The bill putting the marriageable age up to fifteen received the blessing of the Indian Government. The Minister of Works, Mines, and Power said that the motives of the mover of the bill were praiseworthy and the government in power "being a national government" need not adopt a neutral attitude to such questions.

Child marriage was one of the very few subjects of a religio-social character on which the British Raj took a definite stand. Most Indian customs were allowed to pass unchallenged, even when they conflicted with British ideas of propriety and obvious British interests. But on

three vital issues they did take up a point of view and express it forcibly.

The second was the revolting custom of burning widows alive on their husband's funeral pyres in the act of suttee. It was supposed to be voluntary. There is ample proof that in innumerable cases it was so, in that the women threw themselves into the flames of their own volition. But it was hardly voluntary in the true sense of the term when the poor, wretched creatures were brought up from infancy to believe that it was their duty. And it was a duty backed by the sanction of the knowledge that life would hold little pleasure for the women who shirked it.

The third practice that the British rulers attacked without mercy was thuggery. In theory, its exponents were worshippers of Kali, the Goddess of Destruction. As an act of worship they fell upon and strangled innocent wayfarers. It was a custom which had the approval of a sect of Hinduism. Some of the "thugs" may have been perfectly sincere, but many used the practice as a cover for plain dacoity. In either form, thuggee conflicted too diametrically with the British attitude towards the sanctity of human life for them to tolerate it, and they swept the system out of existence by rigorous measures.

It is interesting to speculate what might have happened in India if the same resolution had been applied to the status of women generally, or for that matter to the Hindu caste system. India's entire history might have been dramatically changed generations ago. Unfortunately, ever since their Teutonic monarch and his advisers made such a hash of handling the American colonists, successive British Governments have had the edge taken off their assurance of superior wisdom in dealing with other peoples. Perhaps it would have been a good thing for them to have recruited for the Indian Civil Service a strong cadre of my Pennsylvanian forebears, and a leavening of New England consciences. They would not have suffered from any inhibitions about

entertaining undue respect for the religious and social practices in flagrant contradiction to the rights of man as revealed to the founding fathers of the United States. And that would assuredly have been beneficial to the women of India !

## CHAPTER IV

### VOTE TRICKS

NOTHING in India to-day is more amusing than reading the speeches of the leaders of the Congress Party. With one accord, in addresses to the youth of the country, they appeal to their listeners to eschew politics and concentrate on the acquisition of the techniques their country so desperately needs. They say that the best gamekeeper is a reformed poacher—or one who finds gamekeeping more profitable; in that case the Congress men should make good rulers. For decades they won enormous prestige in the United States and among their own people by proclaiming that they were struggling for democracy and adult suffrage under which India would be ruled by her people for her people. Now their programme is catching up on them fast, and it does not look so good at close quarters.

"How is adult suffrage going to work out in India?" I asked at a small gathering in my hotel suite not long after I had arrived there this year.

"Each man for himself, and don't all speak at once," chuckled John, one of the old-time residents of India who has adjusted himself easily to changed conditions and has so won the affections of the Indians that he can, with impunity, indulge in leg-pulling which would win anyone else instant enmity.

Kukkoo, an Indian Cassius, drew beetling eyebrows down over the deep, almost purplish pits from the depths of which his eyes gleamed. "It will work splendidly in constituencies where there is no contact," he snapped. "Anywhere else it will be such a colossal gamble that only a lunatic would attempt to forecast its ultimate end."



John waved his cigarette in Kukkoo's direction. "Come on, now," he urged, "you can't say that much without saying a lot more. I seem to remember a time when you were demanding the institution of adult voting at the top of your voice. Why so dramatic a change in your views?"

"Because everything has altered since the withdrawal of the British," he replied.

"Not at all," John protested gently. "It would not be fair or honest for anyone to believe that the situation has really changed."

"But it has—beyond all belief," Kukkoo declared firmly.

"I can't see it," said John. "To my mind the problem of attempting to introduce our ideas of democracy is exactly the same as it has been for generations. About one per cent of the population may be sufficiently world-conscious to be capable of exercising the privilege of suffrage in something approaching a useful and intelligent manner."

"You are too harsh," objected Ramanlal, eyes as prominent and startled as any rabbit's, searching all our faces for support.

It was the childlike appeal one would have felt mean to rebuff.

"Don't be so unnecessarily provocative, John," I reproved. "You know perfectly well that you say such things merely to stir up the argument a bit."

"Normally, I should have to agree that you were right, and promise to behave better," John grinned, "but this time it so happens that I mean every word I say."

Ramanlal shrugged helplessly. "It is true that the literacy level is very low, but it will not be long before we can count it at ten per cent. How can you put the percentage of potentially sensible voters as low as one per cent?"

"Elementary, my dear Ramanlal," John answered, pointing his matchbox accusingly at the plump little Indian. "In fact, now that you remind me of the literacy rate, I begin

to think that I was over-generous in my estimate. In any country, there are probably not more than ten per cent of the voters who really understand the issues on which they are asked to decide. But in societies which have progressed slowly and methodically to adult suffrage it doesn't greatly matter, as the population grows up with an instinctive sense that it is automatically bad for any party to be in power too long. So, although only ten per cent may vote upon the questions of the day as the result of genuine knowledge and understanding of them, it doesn't greatly signify. All the main parties have equally good slogans and catchwords to rake in the uncomprehending to their cause. One batch of slogans will pull in one variety of sentimentalist, and another will attract a second variety. Thus they cancel themselves out. And with a floating vote always ready to side with the party out of office, the chances are fairly high that it will be the placing of the votes of the ten per cent which will largely settle the outcome of the poll."

Kukkoo made as if to interrupt, but John went on relentlessly, "Let us imagine for a moment that, when the elections take place, a party were to put forward candidates on a programme of abolishing all taxation. What do you think would happen?"

"They would sweep the poll," said Kukkoo despondently. "That is more or less what I'm afraid of. Everyone knows that there's no party in the true sense of the word, apart from Congress. But when the elections come on, any fool who can talk friends into nominating him will be able to draw votes by promising whatever it may be that the voters in his constituency most want. They aren't to know whether the promises are feasible or not."

"Then why did you say that everything had changed since we handed over?" John argued. "Your potential voters haven't suddenly changed their natures."

"Ah, but the issues have changed," Kukkoo exclaimed triumphantly.

Rajesh, in many ways a man more of the West than of the East, spoke for the first time. "You are both right. When we all clamoured for full democratic government, we didn't really want full democratic government at all, though we are only now beginning to find that out. What we wanted was a plebiscite on the subject of British or Indian rule for India, because we knew the answer to that before it was put. Now we are caught in a trap. We have committed ourselves so completely to full democratic institutions that we have no alternative but to try to work them. It's madness, but there's no escape. What we should have, ideally, is a partial return to our own indigenous system with the village and not the individual as the unit of society. Then we could have district councils chosen by the villages, not on theoretical grounds or on the strength of the members' capacity for making effective speeches but on the intimate knowledge that villagers have of each other. On the basis of district council, we could build up larger authorities, elected by district councils but with literacy tests for candidates, and so on until we arrived at a national parliament elected by indirect suffrage."

"But that sounds fine and dandy, Rajesh," I commented. "I can't see why you describe yourselves as caught in a trap though. The scheme you have just outlined would provide all the democratic safeguards needed and would avoid the pitfalls inseparable from adult suffrage among peoples with no experience of voting."

Rajesh smiled. "Ask John. He will know the answer."

"I do," John retorted, but there was no satisfaction in his voice. "I know it just too well. If you attempt to modify the full suffrage regime, you as good as present power to the Communists. They'd howl with glee and spread the story far and wide that Congress had sold out to 'big money,' and that the change of the electoral system was simply a device to perpetuate the rule of privilege."

It was a useful introduction to the complexities of modern Indian politics. They are in a state of flux. No one, not even leading politicians themselves, have more than the shadowiest notion of what may happen next. Trade unions have developed in the most astonishing fashion in the past year or two. It is true that they are still representative of only a tiny fraction of the total population and a relatively small section of employed labour. But the members of the unions are commonly men in key industries, and Communists have worked themselves into the top jobs in many unions. That gives the Red leaders an importance out of all proportion to their numbers.

The All-India Congress Party, more generally known and invariably referred to by its members as Congress, is creaking at every joint ; and the frequency of the creaking is astonishing friends and foes alike. While it occupied the role of opposition and could settle down joyfully to the task of destroying the existing British regime, there was a wonderful solidarity about the party. That has vanished. Left, centre, and right blocs are taking faint shape throughout the party as a whole ; and in provincial branches the split often develops on purely personal lines as the leading personalities jostle and plot for pride of place.

One of these days when the froth has subsided a bit, it may be practicable to have a look into the wash-boiler to find out what is left. Right now it is about as easy as picking winners at the races. So far, there is only one party that matters, but there are many minor factions which may cause trouble ; and signs of the emergence of a Labour or Socialist party are not wanting. If such an organisation does come into existence, it will probably draw away at least one-third of the support of Congress which will correspondingly move off to the right.

Oddly enough, the one development that nobody in India now regards as likely unless things go very far wrong is the emergence of a Communist India. Yet in the old days, it

was virtually an article of faith for members of the foreign community in the country that the handing over of power by Britain would be followed next day by a Communist regime. Voices quivering with excitement would refer bitterly to the intensely socialistic outlook of Pandit Nehru's writings and speeches. With greater logic and justice they would also speak of the presence inside the All-India Congress Party of open and vociferous Communists, and the prevalence of Communism among the practitioners of "direct action" methods of calling attention to the demand for independence.

What was ignored in the past, but is making itself increasingly obvious now, is that the true Communist and the honest Nationalist could travel in double-harness only up to the moment of the British withdrawal. At that instant their partnership dissolved and mutual detestation took its place. Few indeed are those who can truthfully claim to have foreseen how events would turn out. I can think of only one. He was a British official stationed at Delhi. In the later stages of the war, he spent most evenings at one or other of the clubs drinking steadily with great solemnity and terrifying dignity. If addressed late at night he always replied in a monotone, almost one word at a time, and talked brilliantly.

It is one of the injustices of life that, whereas ordinary, straight conversation is easy to recall, it is nearly always impossible to bring back to mind the remarks of those rare and fortunate people who talk really well. Probably their charm is partly that the turns of phrases they use are so stimulating that they give rise to cross-currents in the brain of the listener, and memory is confounded.

This chap's theory was that India was infinitely more likely to develop into an authoritarian state on Fascist lines. Instead of the state taking over the peasants' little plots and cattle, it would leave them in possession and take the crops and increase. He based his belief on the fact that

wealthy Indian businessmen provided funds and backing for a party which nominally advanced a programme aimed against them. To him, this indicated that whatever the mouthpieces of Congress might say in public, its brains and organisers were supplied by quarters which would certainly not be overjoyed by thorough-going Socialism, let alone Communism.

"Apart from any other consideration, my dear Dorothy," he explained, "it is of the essence of Communism that it should cause tremendous upheavals. When the British go, there will be quite enough upheaval. Congress leaders will become the new vested interests with the strongest of all possible motives for preventing the Communists from growing too powerful. And if the Communists try to fight it out, they will be dealt with much more rapidly and firmly than we have ever done, or are ever likely to do. We've got to the stage of taking accusations of oppression levelled against us much more seriously to heart than they are taken by those who make them. They bring the charges as a means of applying pressure. They don't have to believe in oppression in order to use slogans which will arouse the masses to civil disobedience and thus touch the hearts of your countrymen, who manage to be so astonishingly sentimental about the lot of any peoples outside the United States. If we arrest a lineal and moral descendant of the original Thugs, the case is a gift; and a further proof of our determination to perpetuate our brutal subjugation of the Indians; with the result that we shun action against those who most richly deserve to be locked up, thereby encouraging shady characters of all descriptions to climb on the Congress band-waggon.

"There is a nasty shock coming to a great many people when they have to deal with an independent Indian Government," he continued. "The Indian is not sentimental. He has a potential of ruthlessness, which, had we possessed it, would have made the present prestige of

Congress impossible. It would have been smothered at birth. The boys who rock the boat after our time will find themselves in the jug without the formality of trial. And if that doesn't convince them of the error of their ways, there may well be a sharp increase in the mortality rate."

The second part of his prophecy has not come true—yet. Perhaps it never will. But on general trends, his views are daily proving to have been sound.

The R.S.S.—militant Hinduism—provides a case in point. They may look like a lunatic fringe from the outside, but inside India they mean real trouble. Leaders and followers alike are fanatics. They are the most dangerous kind of fanatic, at that—the religious type, with a deep-rooted conviction that the world is out of joint and that it is a darned good thing for the world that they have been born to set it right. Their doctrine is simple. They want to make India a Hindu state run strictly by the Hindu hierarchy. Foreigners and minorities, to say nothing of the lower castes of Hindus themselves, would be lucky if they were left alive. After all, it was one of their members who assassinated Gandhi.

It is a dangerous sort of poison to ladle out to children, especially children with the strength of men, and occasionally, with the passions of fiends.

It is doubtful whether the British could have coped with such an outbreak. Perhaps they would have managed to arrange things so that the situation could not arise. But if it had arisen while they were in power, they would not have been able to round up the active elements with the speed and thoroughness which the present Indian Government has displayed. Every Hindu politician, even if he loathed every plank in the R.S.S. programme as fervently as though it were a physical plank aimed at his head, would have joined in the hue and cry, agitating for civil disobedience, strikes, sabotage, or open violence according to his temperament and habits. Most of them probably would have organised

"non-violent" demonstrations on such a scale that they would have been bound to get out of hand, and end, as they so often did, in the roasting of a few hapless policemen or some such other non-violent occupation. Such high spirits, after all, were only to be expected and could not truthfully be described as bloodshed !

The same goes for the Communists. A few years ago, the boys who fancied themselves as commissars were heroes and martyrs if they happened to go so far over the line that the British Raj grabbed them, and popped them into jail. To-day, they are not given the chance of exhibiting their prowess. Instead of being allowed to proceed from talk to action, and from action to more serious action until the elastic limits are passed, they just have to talk out of turn a little too loudly ; and into prison they go.

Paradoxically, the more energetic measures of the independent Government of India against the Communists does not mean that the danger of the country going bright red has diminished. On the contrary, as far as an impartial observer can see, the chances have greatly increased.

Just before I flew from London to Bombay at the extreme end of 1948, an Englishman who had lived in all parts of India and Pakistan asked me to write him my impressions of how the political atmosphere of the country was changing.

"What do you expect me to find ?" I demanded.

"Not a great deal, yet," was the answer. "But what you see may give me a pointer as to whether my fears are likely to be confirmed."

"And the fears are ?"

"That India will be either a complete dictatorship or an oligarchy within a few years."

"But surely their whole aim is in the opposite direction ?"

"It is," he agreed, "but there have been one or two initial blunders that will almost certainly lead to trouble. The biggest of them all was the wholesale scrapping of rationing which took place as soon as we handed over. It



was totally unjustified by the facts of the situation. The Indians knew that. But as they had consistently blamed rationing on the British Government, they had no alternative but to try to throw it overboard at the first opportunity. They've already had to start bringing it back. Unless I'm completely mistaken, rationing is likely to grow tighter rather than easier. That won't be popular. Worse still, the brief period when controls were off sent all prices rocketing and made life correspondingly harder for the poorest groups."

My friend can have the gloomy satisfaction of knowing that at least to some extent he was right. Life has not proved easier for the poor. Wages have soared, but they are only just hanging on to the tail of the prices. In that, India is not singular. Inflation as a national disease is as common as colds among individuals, and quite as catching. Very few countries have escaped a dose in the post-war years. In most of them the symptoms have been a slight fever, considerable discomfort from aches and pains, and a fairly rapid recovery. India's attack is more complicated. The patient was just recovering from a major operation which was to have left him twice the man he was before. Now, the depression inseparable from an influenza cold has caused a grave loss of energy.

India has some three hundred million people. Most of them look no further than the next meal, if there is one to look towards. A few—in relation to the total—are beginning to be politically-conscious. But even the vast, inarticulate mass had heard of the campaign for independence; and had gathered a vague impression that all the ills their flesh was heir to sprang from the fact that they were subjected to an alien power. The less their comprehension, the higher their hopes. Independence, so far as they were concerned, was going to mean that there would be no more taxes to pay; that monsoons would always break at the appointed hour; that two stalks of rice would spring up where one

had grown before ; and, in short, that they all would have a very hap-hap-happy time.

It has not happened. Taxes have, if anything, increased and will have to be pushed still higher ; the monsoons have been exceptionally irregular and unsatisfactory ; rice is scarce ; and nobody is having a wonderful time at all. High expectations and a low diet make an uncomfortable mixture. It might not be so bad if the position could be expounded adequately to the hungry millions. But efforts in that direction are pretty hopeless when the average Indian peasant or industrial worker has as much chance of understanding the elementary economics as I have of carrying on a sensible conversation with Baruch on atomic energy in terms of pure mathematics. Neither of us would know what language was being used.

All this disappointment and hardship creates the sort of atmosphere that agitators dream of.

There should be less dynamite lying about the Indian scene if there were any real prospects of some of it being burned harmlessly in the open by-elections as we know them in the West. If things look too tough under a government led by one party, the discontented can always let off steam by voting in another party capable of providing an alternative government. There is no second party in India at the moment which could offer that palliative to the suffering. In fact, there is only one official party—Congress.

It is difficult to see where a second party, other than Communist, or Extremist of another complexion, is to come from. Pandit Nehru is a Socialist. The exigencies of the day may be forcing his government to avoid any drastic experiments in the application of Socialist principles, but he and most of his closest henchmen are undoubtedly well left of centre. Other elements exist within the Congress Party, and indeed, in its highest councils, but as a whole the party might be fairly described as left of centre. Unless rapid

developments take place, the planned national elections are bound to be rather in the nature of a farce. The electorate will be all dressed up, with a ballot paper, but nowhere special to go. It looks like the question will be, "Will you vote for us, or would you rather vote for we?" So the only difference between it and an election some distance farther to the north will be that in the latter case the question would be differently worded, "Will you vote for us—or else!"

In spite of the mists of illusion in which the country wreathes itself, occasional newspaper articles and speeches hint that the lesson of India's neighbour Burma have not passed entirely unnoted.

India has had two colossal slices of luck, politically. It was under British rule rather longer than Burma, and it never suffered from invasion. As a result of the first factor, there existed at the time of the transfer of power a large pool of trained civil servants and administrators. But for a handful of British members of the Indian Civil Service, the new national government took over a team fully able to run the day-to-day affairs of state irrespective of what the political leadership of the nation might do. Most of them had been ardent supporters of Congress and nationalism for at least a decade anyway, so there was no danger of a witch-hunt against "stooges." On the second count, India scored even more decisively. It meant that the countryside was not littered with guns in the hands of people who were not too sure what happened when one pulled the trigger but were dying to find out.

Those two factors apart, the basic situation is not so very different. Both India and Burma would be pretty mad if they heard me say so. Each has the normal belief that his fellow-countrymen are a long way ahead of the fellow next door. In both countries the bulk of the population is illiterate and has no experience or understanding of the democratic system.

An added complication in India is the continuance of the Hindu castes. The object of the government is declared to be the creation of a secular state and a class-free society. Laws have been passed to eliminate the term "untouchables". They are now referred to as Harijans—the term Gandhi used—and are theoretically freed from the sub-human status to which they were assigned in the past. It sounds grand, and means nothing. A law can be approved with acclamation in five minutes and still take five or fifty years to be converted into a reality.

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel is not notable for hiding the light of independent India under a bushel. Some quarters suspect that he would be more likely to exhibit the bushel and swear that there was a very bright light underneath it which the benevolent government was not prepared to expose for the time being lest it damage the sight of the beholders. Yet he has admitted that the problem of untouchability has not yet been touched. During my recent visit to India he told an audience at Mysore, "Although legislation is being forged to root out untouchability, the hearts of peoples have not yet undergone the necessary changes, and so legislation alone cannot eradicate untouchability."

So there is one roving joker which might turn up in any hand at election time. Untouchables will get to vote. With it they will acquire a very important measure of political power. How will they use it? They have no reason to feel particularly gratified with the present order. It has brought them no relief, whatever good intentions the government may have. Within a few days of the speech by the Deputy Prime Minister, a part of which I have just quoted above, a brief report in one of the leading dailies recorded unemotionally that in a country district where drought was causing famine and chronic shortage of water, untouchable wells were dry and the untouchables were still forbidden to draw "pani" from the supplies used by other Hindus.

An Asian writer recently declared that the future for the peoples of the Far East was bright since they were the inheritors of the technical advances of the West, and would be able to move at one step from the era of the bullock-cart to the age of jet planes and atomic power !

Even on the level of the mechanical, that seems a dubious advantage, though experience in the Second World War did tend to show that man is amazingly adaptable in the material things of life. How will it work on the mental and moral planes ?

Assa Singh, a Sikh who regards with alarm the antics of his compatriots in the ranks of the Akali Sikhs, and who is remarkably fair-minded, said thoughtfully one day that he felt that the chief sins Indians had a right to lay at Britain's door were not *sins of commission* but *sins of omission*.

"I don't complain about the British rule as having been oppressive," he said, "but I do complain that it was not oppressive enough."

"Well, Assa, your complaint has the merit of being original," I laughed. "I don't recollect anyone making that charge before."

"Perhaps not. It is the real crime they committed all the same."

"Why ?"

He shrugged. "They broke down the old social system. Perhaps they only meant to remove what was evil and unjust in their eyes. What they don't seem to have realised is that the features they regarded as abuses were part and parcel of a living thing. They cut them out. Then they were surprised that they had to deal with a corpse. They had to push and pull madly whenever they wanted to move it the slightest fraction of an inch in any direction. If they let it go, it slumped back. What else did they expect ? What would they do to a surgeon who said that because a man's heart was not working properly he would cut it out, or that a birthmark on the jugular vein looked ugly and he

would have to cut away part of the neck and leave it to mend ? The blemishes they saw were an integral part of India. Yet they hacked at them and left it at that. No doubt their motives were admirable, but the results were deplorable."

"What do you think the British should have done, then ?"

"Set up a new system to take the place of the old. Once the old, direct, personal chain of authority was broken, the country was like a horse without a rider. It needed to be ruled. The British did not rule. They ran the machinery and hoped that everything would turn out for the best. How could it ? They introduced the European idea of representative government and allowed it to spread throughout the land. But they didn't force education upon the people fast enough to equip them to run representative institutions."

"But surely the increasing of education was one of the matters which was attracting the most attention from the British Government just prior to the hand-over," I suggested.

"Oh yes, they were preparing to do something when it was already too late. The time to make the whole population literate was before the Indian leaders had studied in England and returned determined to apply modern methods."

"But that would have involved terrific expense and would have meant clapping on the heaviest of taxes, wouldn't it ?" I queried.

"Of course," Assa replied.

"Wasn't there plenty of trouble over the taxes that were applied ?" I pursued. "I seem to remember that Gandhiji encouraged non-payment of taxes as one of the most effective of non-violent methods against the British Government."

"That was all part of the game," he laughed. "It was already too late by then. It would have been far better for India in the long run if the later generations of British administrators had remained as bold as the early ones. Oh, I know that I've just finished accusing them of careless

surgery. Both statements are true. The pity is that having started to remould the social pattern to suit their conceptions, they, or their successors, didn't continue the process. They grew timid. They tolerated, indeed they perpetuated anachronisms out of their anxiety not to upset anyone. If they had acted before the present generation of politicians had arisen, they could have applied what taxes they thought necessary without any effective opposition, and pushed through whatever reforms they wanted. Then the new democracy would have grown naturally from the bottom up, with consequent strength. Now it is completely artificial and is going to have to be applied from the top down. What the ultimate result will be, nobody can tell."

As Assa said, anything may happen when the first Indian general election is held. It is bound to be fantastic, even for India.

Over the Indian Ocean, in Singapore, the first election ever held in the island on an adult suffrage basis produced some comic interludes ; but it also provided some simple but ingenious ideas which might help India to cope with somewhat similar problems.

Singapore surmounted the difficulty of illiteracy among the voters by assigning a symbol to each candidate. It was not a mathematical symbol, or anything complicated like that. Each candidate was represented on the ballot papers by a drawing of an animal. It worked fine in an election in which a few thousand people took part. It might not work so well in the immensity of the Indian electorate. Besides, the organisers would have to be pretty careful that there was no sabotage by officials with an over-developed sense of humour. They could create considerable chaos if they took to expressing personal opinions on the merits of the candidates by their choice of suitable animals. I figure that the mildest of politicians would be liable to raise a rumpus if he found himself identified on the ballot papers by a drawing of a jackal.

Much as anyone brought up in the American or British tradition is bound to dislike the idea of an election with only one effective party represented, it will probably be a good thing for India if that should prove to be the case for a good few years ahead. The interregnum ought to give a buffer period in which the electorate will have some hope of learning what it is supposed to do and how this strange business of making marks on pieces of paper is connected with the realities of finding enough to eat and drink.

If the Congress Party splits, as it could easily do at almost any moment, a competition is likely to start between the rival forces to see which can outbid the other. The national esteem for Pandit Nehru will in any circumstances ensure a high proportion of the votes going to the party or section with which he is connected. Several other Ministers and public officials would have the same power of attracting votes for the policies they endorsed. But extravagant promises will always win adherents in any country, and most of all in lands where the ballot-box is a new-fangled mystery.

We in the West have lost the faculty of believing in fairies after we have reached a certain age. We have also lost faith in miracles, especially the kind vouchsafed by political chieftains. No inhibitions of that kind will apply in India for several decades to come. The masses there retain into manhood and womanhood a touching and child-like faith. If someone undertook to see that everybody had twice as much curry and rice as they have ever had in the past without doing more than sitting in the sun and contemplating the patterns executed in betel-pan expectorations, millions would take the pledge at its face value.

Why shouldn't they? They live in a world peopled with spirits, good and evil, which have to be courted and propitiated. Weird figures from the crowded ranks of Hindu mythology and the Hindu pantheon are at least as real to them as the beggars picking lice out of each other's hair in



the bazaars, or the holy men who sit under the village banyan trees waiting for the villagers to acquire merit by dropping manna into their begging bowls.

However, the last word on the electoral problems of India is not yet ready to be written. These problems will probably begin to make their appearance in earnest only after the first attempt of the government to operate the machinery at the first national general election.

In the meantime, the Collector of Bombay has submitted an interim thought upon the subject which is distinctly illuminating. He has asked the Government of India for instructions on how to deal with a particular 100,000 adults in Bombay city. It is as pretty a case of passing the buck as one could wish to see.

His question arises from the rules for the compilation of the electoral roll. It is laid down that, for inclusion on the roll, an elector must have, in addition to other qualifications, a residence in a particular electoral unit. For that purpose a person is assumed to have a residence with "a fixed sleeping place." Bombay's Collector finds that in the city's bazaars and streets there are at least 100,000 adults who are fully qualified to vote except that they have nowhere in particular to sleep. Coolies, hawkers, vagrants, they sleep where they find themselves at the close of the evening. Their residence may be a shop doorway one night, a refuse heap the next.

These permanently-homeless types formed only one of the headaches which accompanied the enumeration of the potential electorate. The Collector reported that the percentage of adult voters out of the total population was forty-three. His report pointed out that the low expectation of life means that there must be fewer adult voters out of every hundred of the population in India than is the case in Western countries. The report went on, according to versions published in the press of India, "Secondly, owing to the ignorance of a large number of people, the electoral

staff did not get the required co-operation from the people, and in some instances, they were threatened with assault."

The expression "did not get the required co-operation from the people" is the kind of masterly understatement that the Indian administration habitually uses. In this case, whether that phrase was employed from force of habit or for the sake of the delayed action effect, it would be rash to guess.

## CHAPTER V

### PRINCIPALITIES AND POWERS

MENTION India to any group of people in the West and ask them to write down at once a single word suggested by the name. If the members of the party are exceptionally up to date, and somewhat politically-minded, they might to-day write "independence." The chances are, however, that the majority of them would write "Rajahs." The two ideas are so linked in people's minds that they go together like "cheese" and "crackers." Yet few realise how large a part the Princely States have played in India's history, or how rapidly the old Princely India has vanished since the disappearance of British rule.

At one time there were five hundred and sixty-two separate states. Each had its own ruler. Now that state of affairs has become a memory. Within eighteen months or so, the new Indian Government has ironed the Princely States out of existence as a power in the sub-continent.

Of course in some cases there was not much needed in the way of ironing, since the entire state could be dropped into a fair-sized city park without bulging the boundaries unduly. At least one used to be given in the books of reference as having a total population of between twenty and thirty persons. Others, notably Hyderabad, were not so easily made to conform to the new pattern; but the "will of the people" prevailed, especially with the backing of an army overwhelmingly more powerful than anything the Princes could muster.

For many years past, everybody outside the states, and not a few inside them, has been convinced that the Indian State was an anachronism. Artificial circumstances had perpetuated enclaves of feudalism inside a country which was

rapidly moving towards a totally different form of society. The popular Indian explanation was that it was all another deep-laid British plot to retain a hold on India. All Princes, in the eyes of the Nationalists, were stooges of the Imperialists. They were also castigated as reactionaries, oppressors of the poor, and deadly enemies of all social progress.

On the average, not one of the charges was true. It would have been easy enough, had the British Government so wished, to have presented a legal case for the retention of treaty obligations between any one of the states and Great Britain. Many of the Princes resented bitterly the limited amount of supervision exercised over their affairs by British Political Advisers. Some were mild reactionaries. Others set standards of living for their people and of educational advance ahead of anything in the rest of the country.

When all is said for and against the Princely India of the dying days of British rule, there is one inescapable conclusion to be reached. The states had outlived their day. Even if India had not been given her independence, it is inconceivable that changes would not have taken place. Even the British talent for mumbling, "Treaty relations, and all that, old man. Can't do anything about it. Been going on for the past couple of hundred years," could not have survived much longer. However pally the great-great-great-grandfather of the present Rajah of Tiddlypush might have been with the servants of the Queen who took over from the bright boys of the East India Company, the terms of the treaty they hatched up between them had gone out of date.

Some of the rulers were smart and saw the changed times coming. They kept an eye on the introduction of representative government into the provinces of British India and moved in step. They set a statutory limit to the Privy Purse. They chose their Dewans, or Premiers, with care. And when the final stage came, they were able to move

smoothly from their ancient alliance with the British Crown to the position of part of the structure of a unified state, without loss of power, prestige, or income. In a few cases, members of the Princely Order have moved up a peg or two. It has even happened that a Maharajah has been appointed the chief official of a union formed by the amalgamation of contiguous small states, at the suggestion of the Parliamentary Congress Party.

For others, an era has come to an end. Power limited only by the watchfulness of a British Adviser has been wrested from them. Many who had habitually squandered like water the funds extracted from miserably-poor subjects have seen their civil lists sliced. Their states, instead of being fully independent units, have been either absorbed by one of the provinces or merged with other states.

On paper, the integration of the states, which by the beginning of 1949 had already affected all but some twenty of them, will save a great deal of money. An official report issued at that time estimated that some twenty million rupees, roughly one and a half million sterling or six million dollars, would be saved annually by cuts in the Privy Purses of state rulers, excluding economies made in some large and important areas. The excepted sections included the thirty-five states of the Vindhya Pradesh grouping, the prosperous Patiala, and East Punjab Union of States, and the States of Baroda and Kolhapur.

In years to come, the hopefuls expect to save more money still. Some of the rulers have been allowed to retain Privy Purses of over a million rupees a year. Incomes of that size are to come to an end with the lives of the present holders of Princely titles. Their successors, as plans stand at the moment, will be allowed to keep their dignities but will have to maintain them on a lower standard.

It is undoubtedly wise and sound that the fantastic patchwork quilt of the states should have been sorted out. In ten years time it may help to make India a better place to

live in. At the moment it is a change without a difference as far as the people of the states are concerned. There are now new figures to be propitiated and garlanded whenever they appear, lest they clap on new taxes. Otherwise life goes on much as before. The same is probably true for the vast majority of the rulers, except that they will either not be associated with the running of the machinery of government at all, or else will have a council chosen by vote instead of a hand-picked group of advisers. But as many of the Princes very wisely left all the hard work to their chief officers in any case, they will hardly notice the difference.

It was one of my chief regrets that an opportunity did not present itself this year to visit a certain Rajah whose acquaintance I made by accident during the war. His precise status in the Princely hierarchy never did become quite clear; that it was an obscure one was not hard to guess.

The ranking of the Princes was very accurately defined. Five of them were entitled to salutes of twenty-one guns. Six rated salutes of nineteen guns. In all, one hundred and forty odd states out of the total were recognised as gun states. For some peculiar reason, the lowest number of guns was fixed at nine. It was a case of nine guns or nothing. But even if the graduated scale had been carried right down to the last gun, I doubt if my little Rajah would have been accorded anything more than one shot from a dilapidated airgun.

His palace was imposing—from a distance. That was how we came to meet. From the main road, the massive walls had the aspect of a picturesque ruin, with a handful of mud and grass huts, typical of the Indian village, scattered around the huge structure.

The illusion of grandeur lasted nobly as far as the shadows cast by the ancient walls upon the baked earth of the slight eminence upon which they stood.

Interested in making a closer inspection, I scrambled up the rocky path leading to a battered, metal-studded door of heavy timber opening into an untidy courtyard. A disreputable ruffian in what had once been a livery of sorts barred my entrance by excited gesticulations and a flood of incomprehensible speech. He was presumably using one of the two or three hundred dialects of India, but as he interlarded it with the Urdu word for "Wait". I did so. He watched me anxiously for some seconds and then vanished through the doorway, to reappear almost immediately accompanied by a lean, elderly Indian who enquired in English as to what my business might be.

When I explained that I had detoured from the main road to have a closer look at the ruins, an expression of pain crossed his face. "This is not a ruin," he chided. "It is the palace of His Excellency the Rajah."

"You mean it's inhabited?" I gasped incredulously.

"Certainly," he replied equably, "and as His Excellency is in residence, it would be out of the question for you to enter except by his invitation."

A bellow from within the walls interrupted him. He bowed stiffly and vanished.

Intrigued, I waited to see what the next move would be. After a short interval my interlocutor appeared at the half-open door and motioned me to advance. "His Excellency invites you to tea," he announced, and stood aside to permit me to enter.

The palace stood revealed in all its glory as I passed into the open space enclosed by the stone walls of the old fort. It consisted of a series of whitewashed, lean-to erections built against the original structure. All were exactly alike save that through the open door of one could be seen the shadowy shapes of humped Indian cattle.

His Excellency the Rajah overflowed a chair planted in the midst of the confusion of livestock, broken-down bullock carts, battered barrels, and rusty kerosene cans

which littered the dusty, rocky courtyard ; and near him squatted two shrouded women of the establishment, kneading cow dung into pancakes and slapping them on the sun-bathed walls of the cow shed to dry into fuel.

The integration of states may have brought changes to that palace, but it is not likely. I suspect that if it had been possible to fit it into my visiting list this year, I should have found the enormous spreading bulk of the Rajah in the same position ; and would again have been tendered sections of orange peeled and separated by the fingers of the women summoned to the task from their dung-pies without the formality of washing.

At the other end of the scale, it is unquestionably true that many of the major potentates are still living in the same degree of splendour as in the days before independence. They continue to entertain lavishly. Nowadays their guests may be Parsee millionaires, Congressmen of note, and senior Indian civil servants instead of the British who were mainly honoured in the past. But the entertainment is on the same lines ; and the luxury has suffered no diminution.

Although it is true that for most of the eighty million inhabitants of the Indian States, and for many of their rulers, the swift changes have had few immediately perceptible results, the change is none the less one of the most remarkable in modern history. Almost without a struggle, divisions and sub-divisions which have persisted for centuries, and in some cases through successive invasions, have been rubbed out. The machinery may still be operating much as it has done in the past. That is inevitable ; ten years hence the story will be different. By the time the present generation of rulers has died out, the states will have died out too, for all practical purposes.

Except in the case of Hyderabad, this silent revolution has slipped past with little notice from the world's press. For once the Indian newspapers have scored. They have not failed to appreciate the trend of events at their full



importance. Each step in the process has been generously front-paged and headlined. It made a nice change for me to find a due sense of proportion being exercised by India's editors. Or perhaps that is unconscious flattery. Perhaps after all, they did not realise in the least how remarkable the proceedings were, and merely gave them their rightful degree of prominence by accident. That could easily be the explanation, since the principle on which all newspaper editors and sub-editors in India seem to work these days is to front-page all domestic news. If there is more than enough to fill the front sheet, all items that do not mention Pandit Nehru, Governor-General Shri C. Rajagopalachari, Cabinet Ministers, Congress officials, or Maharajahs, in that order, may be excluded to form the lead stories on all the remaining pages along with small bits of foreign news.

Hyderabad presented a rather special problem. The Nizam not only maintained an undiluted autocracy, but maintained it through the medium of a Muslim ruling class presiding over the destinies of a Hindu population. His supporters and admirers claimed that the autocracy was benevolent ; and it is beyond dispute that in the matter of hydro-electric schemes and various other projects for the benefit of the population at large, Hyderabad could compare favourably with any province of the old British India. But the rule was pure feudalism without the redeeming aura of colour and romance which might have retained for it some affection in the hearts of the humble who sustained it. His Exalted Highness Nawab Mir Osman Ali Khan who had ruled the country for more than fifty years before his overthrow, had banished all the pageantry which might have helped to keep his subjects devoted to the throne. His name had become a by-word throughout India for parsimony. Deservedly or not, he had come to occupy, alone, the place in humorous anecdote which is filled in the English-speaking world by the Scottish race.

The Nizam was the subject of innumerable jokes ; and he did his best unconsciously to live up to his reputation by making appearances in public in undistinguished, shoddy clothes, and riding around his state in an ancient touring car which, by the looks of it when I saw it, the makers ought to have subsidised as an advertisement for the lasting properties of their product. His was hardly the public figure to catch the imagination and win unthinking loyalty. What loyalty he did enjoy was the loyalty of self-interest from members of Hyderabad's ruling minority. He had no real friends among his fellow-princes. Too often had his insistence upon his special status as the only Exalted Highness offended their dignity.

"The Nizam was crazy to get himself into such a position," said one of the prudent Princes at a party I attended recently. "He ought to have seen what was coming and made the best bargain possible."

"As you did ?" I suggested gently.

"Exactly, dear lady," he beamed. "I don't pride myself on many things, but I do pride myself on the belief that my education in England has transformed me into a realist. The English have a very simple but wise saying, 'What cannot be cured, must be endured.' I like that philosophy very much. When I saw the inevitable approaching, I didn't sit down to await it but went out to meet it, determined to make such arrangements as would make it endurable, if not entirely pleasurable."

"Am I to take it that you are not so entirely convinced of the virtues of representative government, universal suffrage, and the overall wisdom of the Congress Party as your public statements would suggest ?" I rallied him.

"Now really," he shrugged. "Do you expect me to commit myself in public to an avowal of my inward convictions ? Our relations with all the leading spirits of the day are most satisfactory. So let them remain !"

"But your private view ?" I persisted.

He laughed. "My private view is that it's delightfully absurd to watch the pantomime of politeness with which we submit to having our coats cut off our backs because we know quite well that the alternative is to have our heads cut off our shoulders. All this is a complete violation of all that was said at the time of the transfer of power. We were assured that the states would be expected to accede to one or other of the two new Dominions only in respect of a limited range of subjects. On the face of it, our situation with the new authorities was to be almost exactly the same as it had been with the British. Some of the Princely Order even believed that it would work out that way."

"You didn't?"

"Haven't I just said that the British made me a realist?" insisted the Prince. "I know my countrymen much better than the British do. For all their realism, the British have a streak of sentimentalism which frequently leads them to convince themselves that what they wish to be true is true. I expect Mountbatten and many others had honestly persuaded themselves that the pledges given by the new Dominions were ample safeguards for the rights and privileges of the most loyal allies of the Imperial Crown. We knew better. We knew quite well that as soon as the British were out of the way, the squeeze would begin."

"Forgive me if it sounds rude," I interrupted, "but as an American I'm naturally a bit prejudiced against monarchical systems, and I can't help wanting to know whether in your heart of hearts you do not think that the new order is morally justified."

"You probe too deep," he protested with a smile. "It isn't kind to ask a man to question the entire foundation of his existence. But I shall try to answer honestly. I've accepted the imposition of this farcical imitation of Western democracy because it would have been madness to try to resist it. I mean to work as hard as I can to make the system work because its collapse could only open the door

to worse evils. But I think it's wrong, apart altogether from what was little better than force and fraud in bringing it about."

"Why do you say that?" I queried.

"Because the people of India aren't ready for electoral methods. If they had been left alone under the British Government of pre-war days, they might have reached that stage about twenty years from now. In that case, I should have been prepared to agree that the time had come for the states either to disappear entirely or to merge gradually with the rest of the country. For, make no mistake about it, the British would have seen to it that standards of education and of social organisation did not lag too far behind in any of the states. The Political Advisers steered us with a very light rein, but that didn't deceive anyone. What it did achieve was to save face all round. No ruler was publicly humiliated unless he had already offended the paramount power so grossly that his removal from office had already been decided upon. This present regime takes a delight in parading its power. It would almost be preferable to be subjected once again to the sort of verbal attacks to which we grew accustomed in the old days. They were at least honest. Nowadays we can hardly pick up a newspaper without reading a speech by one of our old adversaries praising us to the skies for our patriotism and willingness to co-operate. It's nauseating. It's like a dacoit thanking a merchant for his generosity to the poor after rifling the merchant's belongings at sword-point."

"Would you rather that the country had continued as it was, and not have independence, then?" I demanded.

He sat silent for a little. "No," he replied at last. "No. It would be a lie to say that I'd put the clock back if I could. Now that the die is cast, I wouldn't have it reversed."

I chuckled, "It sounds to me a little, if I may say so, as if you'd like to eat your cake and have it too—and have it till to come, as well."

"It does rather," he agreed ruefully. "I can see that I'll have to go on talking to justify myself. Mind you, I think I can. My opinions aren't as mutually contradictory as they sound. Nearly all of us princes wanted independence in the same sense that we wanted the affairs of India to be in the hands of Indians without the remote control of Whitehall. That was certainly my own outlook. At the same time, a less hurried transition would have been better for the country as a whole."

"How, then, would you have liked to see the transfer of power come about?"

"Without partition and without the elimination of state rule until the people were ready for new ways," he answered unpausingly.

"But surely partition had become inevitable?" I objected. "As far as an outsider could make out, the old antagonism between Muslim and Hindu which had been kept in abeyance by the intervention of the British as the sovereign power, re-emerged with too much vigour to be repressed."

He shook his head. "I don't agree. We, the Princes, are largely to blame for the partition of what should be a single unit. By lack of foresight and collaboration among ourselves, we betrayed the greatest achievement of the British Raj. In the last few decades the British had brought the country nearer to unity than for centuries. I'm convinced that if, when it became clear that the British Government was determined to surrender control, the Princes had been able to sink their differences and work together, we could have prevented the lunacy of tearing apart a living organism. Don't forget that a fifth of the population and more than two-fifths of the area of India was ruled by the states. Had we combined, we would have been powerful enough to act as a brake on both the opposing factions. We could have been the third party in a Federation of Pakistan, Hindustan, and Princestan, forming a United Dominion of India."

"Then why was such an attempt never made?"

"Because the besetting weakness of our people operated against it," he said. "Those who might have given the lead which would have welded the states into a third party could never agree among themselves. Petty jealousies and pride kept them apart. Now we're paying the price of our folly."

Such frankness is exceptional in India to-day. In public, the exchanges between princes and the Congress Party leaders sound like a verbatim report of the meeting of a mutual admiration society. On the whole, the local newspapers swell the pæan of praise and joy.

Here and there, however, a note of caution creeps in. At the time of the conclusion of agreement on the merging of the states of Bikaner, Jaipur, Jodhpur, and Jaisalmer with the Union of Rajasthan, the *Times of India* drew attention in a leading article to possible troubles ahead.

It opened in the normal fashion. "Step by step, swift in any historical perspective," the writer proclaimed, "the consolidation of the Indian State proceeds in steady progression. There is something majestic about the movement, not least because it is a peaceful revolution and, under the guidance of Sardar Patel, marches deliberately in distinct stages yet with Napoleonic speed to the goal of uncompromised political unity." Then came the warning. "Admiration for the process is tempered only by the fear lest this very achievement in its culmination may be wrecked on new regional loyalties carried to extremes that must be fatal to national integrity."

The issue of new regional loyalties is not the only, or the most pressing problem created by the absorption of the states. Some of the Rajahs may have financial headaches when they find themselves on remittance money; but they will have the consolation of knowing that the financial men who have taken over from them will have far bigger headaches.

In days gone by, each state had its own system of taxation. Some of the systems were remarkably simple and economical in collection. Now that the states have acceded to India, it is going to be necessary to bring about some uniformity of taxation for the Central Government, for such purposes as defence. Already it has become obvious that many of the more advanced states will suffer heavy losses of revenue as a direct result of their loss of independent status. Like nationalised industries, once-prosperous concerns may prove additional burdens upon the taxpayers, unless someone astute enough evolves means of offsetting the effects of the change-over. The less advanced states will do well on the deal. The Central Government will have to provide facilities of all kinds or face the possibility of trouble and discontent.

A Finances Inquiry Committee has estimated that it will take ten or fifteen years to adapt the tax systems of the states to the overall picture.

Last, but most important item of all, is the little matter of supplying an alternative form of government to take the place of the vanishing regimes which served the Princes. That is not proving easy. India's rulers seem to be far from certain in their own minds as to precisely what they want to happen. One thing is sure; the Princes will, at least on paper, be rulers in name only. They will hold their positions just so long as they are recognised by the central Indian authorities.

In states where forms of representative government were in force before their incorporation in the Indian union, there has been relatively little upheaval apart from a natural tendency by local Congress groups to seek to promote themselves. It is in the states where no such system existed that its creation has proved difficult. Local Congress parties, which flourished swiftly as pressure was applied on the Maharajah or Nawab from within as well as from without, lost their unity with startling suddenness as

soon as that immediate objective had been reached. Ardent comrades parted abruptly and became fervent enemies as they struggled for supremacy.

The most vivid example of that tendency has been Hyderabad. The fight for the division of the lion's skin began before the lion was dead. It continued with such vehemence that it lent an unaccustomed note of acidity to Sardar Patel's speech to a public gathering in the state early this year—unaccustomed, in that it was in reference to Congressmen. Considerable disillusionment must have gone to framing the state of mind in which he said, "I congratulate the Congressmen for the great sacrifices that they have made for the past five or ten years. But I want to find out whether they can really shoulder responsibility with dignity and efficiency."

Perhaps he was thinking of Bhopal. The first Congress Premier had been in favour of merging the state with the Central Province. That, of course, was in the carefree days when the discussion was of largely academic interest, and before he attained the dignity of Premier. After India attained independence, he changed his mind. His reasons, so far as I am aware, have never been publicly stated ; but some of his critics were so unkind as to suggest that his motives might not be unconnected with the fact that the merging of Bhopal with the Central Province would automatically mean that the Nawab would cease to rule. The alternative course was for Bhopal to join the Madhya Bharat Union. That would have left the Nawab with the same rights and dignities as the rulers of the rest of the states in the Madhya Bharat Union. It would also have necessitated the continued existence of a separate administration with a Premier at its head. The charges may well have been unfounded. Whether they were or not, pro-merger leaders staged satyagraha, or non-co-operative demonstrations, on the pattern popularised by Gandhi.



Wresting power from the hands of the Princes was child's play. Now the task is to find other hands to place it in. That is going to be a man-sized job. Most Indians seem to have few doubts that Sardar Patel is the man. Perhaps he is ; and perhaps he will live long enough to finish it.

One of the accusations levelled against the states used to be that they were strongholds of nepotism. It was a curious charge for Indians to raise ; and the raising of it was a tribute to the extent that ideas, introduced by the West, had taken hold upon the Indian imagination. For in the truly Indian pattern of social structure, nepotism is in no way reprehensible. Indeed, it is a virtue. The first loyalty of the true Indian is, and must be, to his immediate family. The second loyalty is to his caste. The third is to his community. That is the traditional system, and it works. It undoubtedly was applied by the Rajahs ; but it was applied in a severely modified form since the prime necessity of any ruler who wished to enjoy a comfortable life was that his chief ministers should be efficient. It remains to be seen whether the same checks will continue to operate under political control.

For the time being, many of the Hindu Maharajahs and Muslim Nawabs will hold court with undiminished splendour. Visitors to Gwalior who have the good fortune to be entertained by His Highness the Maharajah in the hot season when the rest of the state is an inferno of heat and dust will find, as I did on one occasion, that they approach the artistic, red buildings of the palace through an oasis of trees and lawns kept verdant by armies of gardeners and innumerable fountains. They will walk through the magnificent banqueting hall, exquisite with paintings and tapestries and the opulence of golden tableware. They will be shown room after room full of priceless treasures, ivory carvings, and stuffed lions and tigers killed on hunting expeditions by the Maharajah and his predecessors. Their feet will sink into the deep pile of carpets it seems almost sacrilegious to tread underfoot. Perhaps they, too, will be

entertained by the sight of a dozen of the state elephants kneeling, dancing, and lifting their trunks to their foreheads in the Royal salute. They may even witness His Highness conducting his daily inspection of the racehorses from the Gwalior stables, which in the days of my visit totalled eighty splendid animals.

The Maharajah of Bharatpur may still stage the fabulous, annual duck-shoot which was one of the outstanding social events of the old India.

What an amazing experience that was ! It seemed well-nigh impossible that there could be enough ducks in the entire state to provide targets for the immense assembly of guests invited for the occasion. Yet every gun brought down as many as his marksmanship permitted ; and when the slaughter was ended, enough had escaped to darken the sky with their wings. And when the early morning's sport was over, the guests converged on a forest clearing for what was known as a picnic breakfast. Huge tables spread with spotless napery carried an infinite variety of dishes in priceless china. Cushioned armchairs and divans dotted the clearing. Battalions of uniformed cooks and servants catered to the guests. For that one meal, dozens of bullock carts and motor lorries were used to bring all the equipment for miles from the palace.

Remnants of that expansive life will linger on ; but the era in which it flourished is at an end.

In some states, like Mysore, the population may pay the price. They enjoyed a higher literacy rate than any part of what used to be British India, and a relatively high standard of living. In others, which shall be nameless, anxious husbands and fathers may no longer feel impelled to keep attractive wives and daughters indoors, lest the sensual eye of the Maharajah light upon them during his periodical tours of his domain. No one knew how the humble women felt about the honour conferred upon them, but the menfolk were not at all appreciative ; for once installed in the harem,

or women's quarters, of the palace, their wives and daughters were as bad as dead.

Whatever happens, the bulk of the eighty million inhabitants of the states will scratch the soil as they have done for generation after generation ; and pray for the rains to come in due season so that they can grow enough to stave off hunger. And perhaps, in a good year, they will earn a few rupees to buy clothing or add to the stock of heavy silver armlets and anklets which serve as jewellery for the women and savings banks for the family.

## CHAPTER VI

### BOOK-LEARNING AND BABEL

INDIA'S problems to-day are numerous. At the root of most of them, either as a cause or as a means of cure, lies education. And by savage irony, education itself appears as one of the most complex and difficult puzzles of all.

Drastic revision of India's system of land tenure among the peasants is urgently needed. Under the present inheritance custom, holdings are divided and sub-divided in succeeding generations until one man may have barely enough land in total to maintain his family; and that is split into uneconomic patches not one of which is large enough to be efficiently worked. It is a condition which could be cured; but a real cure would rest upon an understanding of the problem by the peasants; and that demands a measure of education.

Public health and success in the battle against disease depend on persuading the masses that, while it may at one time have been reasonable to go for a walk in the jungles at the call of nature, that course is no longer satisfactory. There are now fewer jungles and more people. But in large parts of the country, there has been no change in the methods of what, for lack of a more accurate term in polite usage, one must call sanitation.

Politics based on adult suffrage will become sheer lunacy unless the adults are at least literate. For them to be really practical, the standard of education should be far higher than mere ability to read simple sentences and write laboriously the minimum of phrases.

Examples of the need for better education could be multiplied indefinitely. It is one of the basic requirements of the new India; and it is one of which the educated

element existing in the country is acutely aware. Indeed, the emphasis placed on education and all its problems is one of the most prominent features of present-day affairs. Everybody who matters knows that to a large extent India will stand or fall by the success, or lack of success, of her efforts to educate her citizens.

The importance of the subject is universally understood. But the joyous and carefree attitude of the majority of vocal India leaves the observer with an uneasy feeling that that scale of the job is less thoroughly apprehended.

An accurate picture of Indian education is hard to arrive at. In the first place, figures for literacy are deceptive. Each province and state has in the past had its own standards to work on ; and it does not always follow through that those who pass as literate in one area would necessarily be accepted in others. In the second place, any approximate estimate has to be based on the old figures for British India, now split up between India and Pakistan and the states which have adhered to the new India.

Roughly twelve per cent of the population can pass tests which permit them to be recorded as literate. Five out of every six who can read or write are men. Those facts are fairly firm. Once an attempt is made to go beyond those simplicities, the trouble begins. Nobody I met in the new India was prepared to hazard even a guess as to how many of the literate members of the population could be described as educated, even in the broadest sense of the term.

Taking the bare minimum of literacy as the objective, the task ahead is sufficient to daunt the boldest. In the old British India, in the last year for which statistics are available, there was accommodation for roughly seventeen million students. That total included pretty well every school and institution of any kind which could be considered as contributing to the educational equipment of the country. Some of the Indian states, especially in the south, were ahead of the average in British India ; but in the states as

a whole, education lagged behind. So it is reasonably certain that the present number of places in the new India is not likely to be higher than seventeen millions, since the access of population from the states after partition brings India's total to roughly the same as that of the former British India.

Because of the low expectation of life in the sub-continent, the population is a very young one. Some forty per cent are below the age of fourteen. Take that as the desired school-leaving age and it follows that with a total of three hundred million inhabitants, India needs schools to hold at least five times as many children as at present, to say nothing of the more complicated problems of higher education.

In 1943, long before it became apparent that the British would hand over full control in so short a time, one of the many devoted British officials of the Indian Civil Service, Mr. John Sargent, Educational Adviser to the Government of India, submitted a scheme for providing free and compulsory education up to the age of fourteen throughout British India. It was a monumental piece of work. It aimed at the recruiting and training of two million teachers. It touched on all aspects of education, from basic teaching to specialised craft training, high schools, and universities.

When the Sargent Report was issued, the commonest reaction was that it represented a most formidable and ambitious programme. Many Indians, and most Europeans in India, suggested that the cost would be prohibitively high and the prospects of attainment slender. Yet it visualised the full scheme as taking a period of forty years to complete at an annual cost of 225 million sterling.

That programme is now being revised. The Sargent Plan of achieving education for all between the ages of six and fourteen at the end of forty years has been discarded as too slow. Those who have demanded a speeding-up of the transition comment that any plan with such a distant target is liable to be shelved. Psychologically, their argument is

sound. The Indian is a highly emotional creature. He can be whipped up into transports of enthusiasm for something round the next bend in the road. As he is also in some ways a simple and trusting person, he may be consoled, on finding nothing round the corner, with assurances that there has been a slight error in calculations and that it is really the next bend again that matters. In fact, if prospects of some immediate result can be held out to him, he can be induced to display the keenest interest and exert a considerable degree of energy.

It was that temperamental characteristic of the Indian which determined the nature of the independence movement. Appeals for a progressive campaign, co-operating with the British Raj, but working steadily to put power into Indian hands, would have been a total failure. Its supporters might have been able to show that it would lead to less disruption and therefore to greater prosperity for the country as a whole. They might have argued, with truth, that the experience gained would be invaluable in years to come. They might even have been right in saying that it could have resulted in full Indian sovereignty, without partition, at an even earlier date. But they would have spoken to deaf ears. It would have been a programme without drama or romance. It would have offered no scope for the self-immolation which is so markedly popular. In short, it would have been intolerably dull.

The men who have taken control of the educational movement since independence are not going to make the mistake of offering a scheme too safe or too dull, however well devised, to appeal to the imagination of their countrymen. They have proclaimed that a beginning on the road to compulsory education for all must be made this year. It is to advance by means of two five-year plans to bring all children between the ages of six and eleven within its scope.

Already the speed-up is running into difficulties. Within the first few months of this year, Education Minister Maulana

Abul Kalam Azad had to tell provincial Education Ministers that the financial experts had been forced to suggest cuts in the outlay on educational plans. He is not likely to be able to give them more comforting reports in the near future. India is not in sight of a buoyant economy as long as food supplies are so short and prices for imported products so high. Funds are going to be hard to find.

Shortage of money is not the biggest cloud in the education sky. The critical factor is provision of the necessary teachers. Provincial and other local authorities have been urged to make the training for teachers of basic schools a priority. The Central Education Authorities in Delhi have intimated that they will be prepared to consider giving financial assistance to further training. Every effort is to be made to attract recruits—every effort, that is, except the one from which genuine results could be expected. In other words, there is still no sign of the payment of teachers being raised to the level at which it might make the profession an attractive proposition.

It is estimated that in India and Pakistan there are well over a million persons out of work of whom the vast majority are educated. Many of them have reached matriculation standard and not a few hold university degrees. On the face of it, they form a pool from which it should be relatively easy to fill the vacancies in existing schools and to staff new schools. In fact, a negligible proportion are remotely interested. It would not pay them to become teachers. As clerks, the matriculates could earn two rupees a day, and men with degrees might draw four rupees. That is not wealth, but it is more than the rate for teachers in basic schools, excluding any allowances.

India is not alone in finding it difficult to secure teachers because of the disparity between the financial rewards of teaching as compared with other occupations. But she has a larger problem. In the United States and Great Britain, and in many other countries with advanced educational



standards, the issue is one of adding to depleted teaching staffs, and replacing wastage. India is trying to multiply the number of her teachers many times, and to do so under the handicap of far more discrepancies. In the West, teachers complain that they are paid much less than men and women of similar attainments in other trades and professions. But as a rule they are at least moderately well placed in comparison with unskilled labour or the lower grade of technicians. In India, the reverse is true. The teacher is badly paid as compared with other non-manual workers, and even worse off in comparison to carpenters, electricians, or mechanics.

A village teacher in the countryside not far from Delhi summed the quandary up neatly. He mentioned that his son was going to the capital. I asked if the boy was following in his father's footsteps as is usually the case in India. "Oh no," the teacher replied, without bitterness, or sarcasm. "He is going to Delhi to better himself. He's going to be a truck driver."

That is the core of India's education problem. The massive structure of compulsory education on which will be erected the superstructure of higher education needs a foundation of teachers for the primary schools. Ninety out of every hundred Indians live in villages. So nine out of ten of the new teachers required will be teachers for small village schools. Indeed, the proportion will be even higher than that since education is already much farther ahead in the great cities than in country districts. So how, in the next ten years, on present planning, hundreds of thousands of young men and women must be induced to adopt the ill-paid profession of village teacher, if all the high hopes of those who regard the Sargent Plan as too slow, are not to fall to the ground?

All sections of Indian opinion that matter are therefore agreed, save as to cost and speed, on the development and extension of education. Where they disagree, with

much sound and fury, is on the ultimate end of the development.

There are three main schools of thought. All three join in damning the legacy of British rule in the field of education—some by faint praise, but more in round terms. They joyfully thrust all blame for the low level of literacy upon the former rulers ; and are both hurt and indignant if one is so rash as to suggest that the experience of such Asian countries as did not fall under Western rule, does not suggest that the Indian population would have been any better educated without the British. It is accepted that the whole system must be remodelled ; it is by no means accepted as to what the new shape should be.

A large and vociferous group urge the establishment of what may be called "utility" education. They have adopted with enthusiasm the theories of the vocational educationists elsewhere, and carried them a stage further. If they win their way, education on the old liberal lines will cease to exist except for a small minority selected by tests as capable of achieving a high level in purely academic subjects.

The protagonists of this outlook build up a formidable case. They argue that in the primary schools less than half show any evidence of being able to benefit by teaching on what have so far been the orthodox lines. More than fifty per cent, they say, are simply not worth trying to educate in the sense of endeavouring to make them learn from books alone ; that half of the potential scholars of primary schools are either slow-thinking or incapable of coherent thought at all. Only five per cent are likely to prove brilliant in their studies. Therefore, the reasoning goes, primary education should be based on "activity method" lines, with some craft to which classwork may be related.

Followers of this school are the most savage critics of the British attempts to educate India. They insist that all the British-sponsored methods produced was a disproportionate

number of half-baked intellectuals. I am inclined to agree, at least in part, but I was surprised to see that view given such prominence in Indian newspapers which ardently support the Congress Party. After all, the driving force of Congress derives largely from young men trained in schools, colleges, and universities run on modified British lines. It is surely unwise, as well as unkind, to designate them as "half-baked intellectuals."

A spokesman of this theory told me that the schools set up by the British had been to blame for innumerable individual tragedies as well as exercising a harmful effect on the country as a whole.

"In the past," he declared, "the schools have concentrated on trying to fit all the pegs into round holes. The only differentiation which has been made is between levels of ability, and not between the various types of ability. The inevitable result has been the production of large numbers of semi-educated youths, devoid of that mental equipment which might have enabled them to advance from what had been drilled into their heads, and condemned for the rest of their lives to fill the posts of clerks or school-teachers. That in turn has led to incalculable misery and discontent among the individuals affected. It has also kept the teaching standard so low as to be virtually valueless."

"Isn't that being rather harsh?" I asked.

"It's not even brutal enough to be the truth," he scoffed. "What sort of education can we hope to give the children if they are placed in the hands of men and women who could not themselves derive benefit from their training? How can such misfits help to bring on a generation better than themselves? All they know is a smattering of the standard subjects—the vernacular languages, mathematics, history, geography, and the like. They don't understand enough to be of real service to their classes even if their classes were composed of children eager to learn those

subjects, and endowed with the brains to acquire and use them."

"What, then, is the answer?"

"We must make the fullest possible use of intelligence tests," he continued. "Many of those who are doomed to be failures at book learning have talents of a different type. Their skill with abstractions may be negligible, but that doesn't infer that they have no talent for such things as can be seen, or handled. We must build the new education so that it caters for the majority who fall into that category. We shall then make the most of a very valuable reservoir of national wealth by permitting the effective employment of millions who would otherwise be steered into blind-alley, non-productive employment. We must set up an entire range of educational institutions of a new type which will be based on agriculture, or mechanical engineering, or the other techniques on which the future of India will depend."

"But what of the minority who can benefit by the traditional system?" I demanded. "Surely they form the ranks from which India will seek to draw administrators, and other key men who don't have highly-specialised, technical qualifications."

"Oh, naturally we'll have to provide for all tastes at the secondary stage," he agreed, "otherwise we won't be able to fill the places at universities. But the accent in the future will have to be on vocational training in all initial stages."

The second important school of thought has aims less easy to define. They are not as firmly utilitarian as the first, but it might be fair to say that they favour the "Three R's" and no nonsense. They would like to see the education authorities moving to ensure that all children had a grasp of the essentials of reading and writing in their mother tongues, with the possible addition of a grounding in mathematics and a common language for the whole of India.

The third school, for all the scorn it heaps upon the British methods, really wants to take them over, with the substitution of an Asian for a European basis. If they have their way, the educational system of the new India will be very much like that of the United States or the United Kingdom. Hindi will take the place of English in all but the early stages of primary schooling, and Sanskrit and Pali will occupy the places given in the West to Greek and Latin.

India's babel of languages does nothing to simplify the problem of education.

Successive waves of invasion in the thousands of years of the history of the sub-continent resulted in the development of a variety of main languages. They, in turn, have further split and changed in character under the impact of the centrifugal tendency which has been the most notable recurring factor. To-day there are at least twelve major languages, each of which is spoken by over ten million people. Most of these major groups separate simply enough into two-language families. Those of the north and centre belong to what are usually called Indo-Aryan languages ; those in the south to Dravidian.

Precisely when and whence the Dravidians entered India is far from certain. It is generally accepted that people of their race were the inhabitants of the Mohenjo-daro Empire which flourished five thousand years ago. But the handfuls of primitive and semi-primitive tribes who still survive in the jungles and the hills of Central India are believed to represent the remnants of an even earlier population driven out by the more accomplished and aggressive Dravidians who themselves were later forced down towards the south of the country by the pressure of the invasions of Aryan hordes from the northwest. Their descendants use languages quite distinct in every way from those of the later invaders. Telegu, Tamil, Kanarese, and Malayalam, are the four big languages of the group. Between them they provide media of communication for some seventy million people.

All the other major languages of India, except one, belong to the Indo-Aryan group. Hindi-Urdu is far and away the most important of the group, and is sometimes referred to as Hindustani. It is the nearest thing to an indigenous *lingua franca*. Muslims and Hindus of the north use Urdu; and Hindus and Muslims of the south and centre use one or the other of the forms, on a regional rather than a religious basis. An Urdu speaker can make himself understood in a Hindi-speaking area; but neither can understand the written language of the other. Urdu is written in Arabic characters from right to left, and Hindi in Devanagari script from left to right. Altogether some eighty million talk in this latter tongue which has the support of Pandit Nehru, and nearly all other leading Indians as the one likely to become the language of law, politics and administration. Marathi, Punjabi, Rajasthani, Oriya, and Gujerati muster from twenty-one to eleven million speakers.

Outside both Indo-Aryan and Dravidian groups is Bengali. It is the mother-tongue of fifty-four millions, and for two reasons is of far greater moment than the number of users indicates. It is probably read and written by a larger number than any other Indian language, since the literacy figures for the Bengal area are exceptionally high. It is also the language of the only significant, modern Indian literature. It is believed to owe its distinctive character to the mixture of races populating the area. They are not a blending of Indo-Aryan and Dravidian strains as in Central India, but have been formed by the intermixing of Dravidians with Mongol peoples who flooded into the country at a later date than the Indo-Aryan invaders.

Indians would undoubtedly stop the survey of languages right there. As far as they are concerned, that gives the outline of the picture. But it is wilful blindness to pretend that English is not a language of India though it is not in any sense one of the Indian languages. Between twenty and thirty million Indians have some knowledge of English,

and some eight millions are literate in English. In other words, it is as much a *lingua franca*, as far as the literate population is concerned, as Hindi-Urdu, even on a statistical basis. On the more realistic basis of width of dissemination, it ranks still higher, since it is as easy for users of the Dravidian languages to be literate in English as it is for them to read and write Hindi. One is as much a foreign tongue as the other ; the difference is that English is infinitely more useful.

All the signs at the moment are that the Indians intend to deceive themselves about English. In the fervour of nationalism, they are ignoring the language, or striving actively to suppress it. To them, the use of English is a painful reminder of foreign domination. So out goes the baby with the bath water.

English is not entirely friendless, however. The Parsees, masters of trade and commerce and important to India out of all proportion to the population of their community, habitually employ English in their dealings with other groups and among themselves. That is not to suggest that they take second place to any other group in loyalty to India. Still less is it indicative of a weakening of their own communal habits and beliefs. They may make every effort to send their boys and girls abroad to be educated and to acquire a well-spoken English accent ; but to whichever Western country they go for schooling and whatever they might learn, they do not depart from their clannish customs, of which perhaps the best-known is that of exposing the bodies of their dead to be torn to shreds by hungry vultures, leaving the picked-clean bones to be dropped into a dry well. None the less, the Parsees send far more students to the West, in proportion to their numbers, than their fellow-countrymen. They know a good thing when they see it.

Frene, a student of world affairs as well as Indian education, is outspoken on this subject.

"What do you think of the 'Hindi for the Indians' campaign?" I asked her one afternoon.

She braced her sturdy figure, tall for a Parsee woman, and a faint glow of colour warmed her tannish skin. "I think it is inspired lunacy," she answered promptly. "Of course we should treasure and exploit our vernaculars. Of course we should conduct all primary and secondary education in them. But this desperation to supplant English as the language of the highest studies merely because it was the language of the foreign rulers is madness. What else is Hindi? It is true that the invasion which brought it to the country was thousands of years ago, but to be consistent we ought to reject it as well and try to reintroduce the language of the Gonds, or the Bhumijis, or one of the other tribes descended from the earliest natives of the land that we can trace. It's not merely that English is an international language, and Hindi is not. On those grounds we might argue in favour of making Tamil the national language rather than Hindi since it is far better known outside the borders of India. The real criterion is whether a language fits the needs of the day. English does, and Hindi does not."

"You won't find many in this country to agree with you there, Frene," I laughed.

"I would find many more than you might think if everybody spoke out boldly," she replied tartly. "We aren't all fools, you know, in spite of the noise and the antics of some of us who ought to know better. It's unpopular to say so at the moment, so therefore many will avoid saying it, but the edict for the suppression of English as the medium of instruction at university level is causing very serious concern among those who have the welfare of their colleges and students at heart."

"But why should it be so?" I insisted. "Remember that I'm no expert on Indian languages, and that it's hard for me to understand why you feel so strongly about it,



Surely it doesn't matter all that much whether the medium of education is English, or Hindi, or any other language you care to suggest? On second thought, why shouldn't India try to establish one special language of her own the same as all other countries have theirs?"

My obtuseness made her throw up her hands in despair.

"Don't you see," she protested, "that there are dozens of objections to using Hindi as the national language?"

"I can't see it at all," I admitted. "I'm quite prepared to accept your word that they do exist, but my knowledge on the subject just isn't good enough for me to argue about it."

"Oh yes, forgive me." Frene's indignation was swept away by a smile. "It's that I feel too much about this. You're quite right. No one can realise how foolish all this nonsense is unless they know both the English and Hindi languages equally well. But even if you know nothing at all of the Indian languages, you should see easily enough that the whole question of providing Hindi text-books will be immense. It would be bad enough at any time, but now . . ." She left the sentence unfinished.

"That far I follow you," I agreed. "Text-books of any kind are undoubtedly at the highest possible premium at the moment, and if the change-over means the printing of large numbers of special editions, it's not hard to understand that difficulties would arise. I realise that most of the important scientific and highly-technical books are in English, and it would involve terrific expenditures to have them translated into Hindi. Yes, I do see now what tremendous difficulties lie in store for the government if they insist on throwing English overboard and only concentrate on Hindi."

"Difficulties?" she rejoined scornfully. "It wouldn't be a case of difficulties. It would be a matter of utter impossibility. If all the books we would need were already set up in type and it was no more than a matter of printing

off extra impressions, the problem would be big enough. It would be worse still if we had to carry out the whole process of printing from existing manuscripts. As it is, the situation is infinitely worse than either of those. There are no manuscripts. Worse still, there is no language."

"What on earth do you mean?" I exclaimed.

"Exactly what I say," said Frene. "If there are not wiser second thoughts on the whole subject, it will mean that somebody will have to invent an entirely new language based on Hindi, to become the medium of teaching in the universities. Hindi as it stands hasn't got the words for modern usage. If it is to be used for the highly-technical literature of the lecture-room, it will either have to be so interlarded with English and other European terms as to lose its character entirely, or it will have to be enriched by newly-created words to such an extent that it will be completely incomprehensible to the ordinary Hindi speaker."

Though Frene's passionate advocacy of English was somewhat unusual, her emotional reaction to the subject was typical. In more ways than one it is true that all Indians do not speak the same language. Each section of the babel clings fervently to its own tongue and is easily raised to heights of fervour by any slight upon it, or any suggestion of differentiation against it.

Immediately after the attainments of independence, Indians were satisfied that in relation to the language problem, as with all other problems, they knew all the answers. Everything was going to be so simple and satisfactory. New India would be sub-divided into provinces on a linguistic basis, with primary education in the local language, and Hindi gradually introduced as the uniform higher common medium. It was a neat and tidy scheme; and for my part, I am convinced that it was, and is, quite sound in principle. Its only fault is that it does not make allowance for the Indians being Indian. The result is that

it is showing distinct signs of coming apart in the new government's hands before it has been properly tried out. Already it has been recommended that the formation of linguistic provinces should be postponed.

Reasons for the second thoughts of India's leaders on the drawing of new boundaries are not far to seek. Historic centrifugal tendencies long held in check by alien rule have not atrophied through disuse. They show unmistakable signs of continued vigour; and furious controversy on language problems can only serve to widen existing breaches. The friction crops up in various forms. In Madras, the provincial government has been bitterly criticised on the grounds that members of minority communities have had to start their own schools and colleges for the education of their children because they found no vacancies for them in existing schools. At the moment that may not be very important; but it is the sort of difference which could lead to real trouble between Madras Province and another province.

Other examples are much graver in character. Bengal and Orissa have quarrelled fiercely over the allocation of three border districts. Each claims that the genuine mother-tongue of the border districts is its own. Tempers have flared high—so high that one member of the Bihar Legislative Assembly declared that agitators against the adoption of Hindi as the language of the district must be suppressed, if necessary, by shooting them down.

Bengal's newspapers took up the squabble with energy. One of Calcutta's leading papers carried an editorial with the inflammatory title, "Bullets for Bengalis."

The Indian Government faces an awkward dilemma. If it presses on with the establishment of linguistic provinces, it must almost inevitably cause an increase in local provincial enthusiasm. If, on the contrary, it maintains the decision to postpone the adjustment in redrawing of boundaries and allocation of states to former administrative areas, it arouses

criticism and opposition within each province or union of states. The means of approach differs. The end might well be the same—further impetus conferred on the perpetual desire of Indian particles to escape from central control.

Perhaps in all the strife engendered by the choice of a national language, there is a further cogent reason to add to those advanced by Frene for retaining English in its former position, not only in the field of education, but for administrative and other purposes. At least all provinces could entertain an equal hate, and find a fellow-feeling in denouncing the stupidity and cowardice at the Centre.

It was interesting to read various comments in the local newspapers a short time ago on the address given by Sir Harilal Kania, the Chief Justice of India, before the Madras Advocates' Association. A few points advanced in one editorial in particular bear quoting, "The topic of greater practical importance which Sir Harilal Kania touched upon is the question of language in courts of law. The warning of the Chief Justice to hasten slowly in this direction is timely and essential. The patriots who are in a hurry to supersede English by an Indian language do not appear to appreciate the realities of the situation. To start with, there is no unanimity as regards the common language of the land. Even if such a language is adopted, it cannot immediately replace English, which has been the language of the law-courts for generations. Law is a technical subject, and it has its technical terminology. In no field of human activity are words of greater significance than in the study and practice of law. For the best part of at least a century the whole concept of law and justice in India has been derived from English jurisprudence; and the commercial dealings of the people have also been moulded by English patterns and English methods of business. All the legal codes governing the social and commercial life of the people are in English; so are the more important documents

of commerce and conveyancing. 'The case-law which is a part of our present legal systems is also in the same language. To talk of replacing all this by a new untried language, merely on the ground of sentiment, is to invite chaos.'

Some of my Indian friends and acquaintances, especially the dark, vital, impulsive types of South India, insist that the ceaseless bickering over education is a healthy sign. No one fights over something that is of no importance, they argue. So if Indians to-day wrangle ceaselessly on educational matters, it is because they are devoting more thought and attention to them than ever before.

It is assuredly one of the marked changes from pre-independence days to find the amount of work that is being put into adult education plans in most of the large cities. It is a movement which has not yet made much of an impact in the villages. That is inevitable. Adult education is, by its nature, more readily handled when it can be dealt with as a mass movement. That is how it is being treated in one big centre of population after another.

The drive behind adult education is something new in India. But it is not a new idea. Work on those lines was started many years ago, but the past two years have seen a remarkable surge forwards. Thousands of devoted teachers are giving their time, many of them on a voluntary basis, to the task of helping millions of their fellow-citizens to attain literacy. The organisation behind the movement is admirable, and so is the spirit of those who bear the burden. It is clearly commendable that so many people are now concerned with the well-being of their fellows ; and that so many of the illiterate are prepared to take advantage of their opportunities. But what will be the final result of this great expenditure of energy and skill ? At best, the adult education drive of the new India will give a fairly small proportion of the population a glimpse of a world which will still remain far beyond the reach of the vast majority.

Now, I know that what I propose to suggest will be regarded as the rankest heresy not merely in India but in my own country and in England as well. In my humble opinion it is open to the very grave question of whether adult education is wise—education of completely illiterate adults, I mean. However carefully mass education of such adults is worked out and applied, the most it can hope to achieve in India, except in the case of individuals so unusual and infrequent that they can be ignored, is to assist the people to read and write simple phrases. The trouble is that from the moment they can read at all, adults who have not enjoyed that privilege before are hypnotised by print. So the net result of mass adult education must be to produce a section of the community capable of reading simple phrases, or slogans, and predisposed to treat such slogans as divine revelations. I may be completely wrong, and I hope that I am, but it sure looks like cooking up danger on a par in the psychological field to nuclear fission in physics.

India has not taken that view. For the moment, the demand is for quantity of education. Quality comes a bad second. If it were otherwise, the whole educational system would have been shaken from end to end this year by the repeated instances of leakages of examination questions in leading centres. Those instances have actually caused very little reaction. It is perhaps encouraging, however, that the Government of India plans to send increasing numbers of the more promising students and of young men from government employ to study at institutions overseas which enjoy world repute in their particular spheres.

## CHAPTER VII

### ADDING INSULT TO INDUSTRY

If the intellectual section of vocal India is like a disillusioned but still trusting and hopeful bride, the industrial section is more like an outraged matron who has found that her husband is entangled with another woman. Not that Indian industrialists have any right to feel deceived ; they have long had warning that a free India would likely be too exacting, if not actively hostile.

It was one of the anomalies of Indian politics in the closing years of British rule that the Congress Party with predominant Socialist leaders drew most of its financial strength from the big industrialists. Whether they thought that they would be able to buy a big enough share of the Party to steer it the way they wanted it to go, or were merely convinced that an independent India was unlikely for many years ahead and that they would have greater power to influence the existing Indian Government through Congress than by direct means, it is hard to say.

A longer interval between the end of the war and the final disappearance of the last vestige of British control might have put the industrialists in the position they sought. The Bombay Plan propounded during the war was an ingenious effort. It had several references to "free and independent government" and such-like bait to cover the hook of something remarkably like an authoritarian system under the effective control of big business. Congress as a whole took the bait, hook and all, but before the strike could be made to lodge the hook fairly in the fish's mouth the end of the war and the subsequent developments swept the entire transaction out of sight.

Instead of being in a commanding position, the industrialists have found themselves under a shadow in the new India. Capitalists of all types and especially the textile mill-owners have found themselves pilloried. Part of the criticism is simply Indian reaction to the general world ferment. Another part is due to the unprecedented growth of unions and the left-wing movements. But the largest factor of all is that the ablest of the politicians had foreseen danger and had made up their minds that India would not follow the path of the first Asian nation to go in for industrialisation on a large scale. They had watched Japan grow in influence with each forward step of her industry, but they had not failed to note that internal power had become concentrated in the hands of a few wealthy families. They had also made up their minds that when independence was achieved it would not be allowed to fall into the grasp of an Indian Zaibatsu.

So the new government has not been kind to big business. Taxation has been heavy. Dividends have been subjected to limitation. Labour claims have been given sympathetic hearing. There have been awkward and unkind inquiries into private fortunes amassed during the war. Constant talk of profit-sharing has spread alarm and dismay. Above all, the new India has flirted outrageously with the nationalisation temptress. One way and another, the industrialists have had a sorry return for the sums they lavished on nourishing the independence movement.

One of the results of the attitude adopted towards industry has been to imperil the programme for rapid and immense expansion of industrial production. No money is forthcoming for the opening of the flood of new industries on which such high hopes are placed for increasing the country's prosperity. Those who have capital to invest are holding back. Their idealism and nationalism are not fervent enough to induce them to endanger their money until they



are much more certain than at present as to future political stability.

The men at the top have seen the menace. Most of their followers may still be cheerfully optimistic about the economic position ; not so the members of the Cabinet and their closest henchmen. The 1949 Budget made some concessions to industry and, about the same time, there was a spate of assurances from leading figures that nationalisation plans were being shelved and that capital must come forward and play its part in progress and development.

How far the change of tactics will have an effect, no one is yet prepared to say. Industry has so far taken the stand, "We are glad to hear that the gun is not loaded, but we would rather see it thrown away altogether."

Apart from the adverse effect of the accusing finger levelled by the Indian political world against the businessman, the great industrial expansion is going to have to face the complications of changed relationships between employers and labour.

"Trade unionism will be the ruin of India," was the gloomy prognostication of one large employer of labour.

"Why should it ?" I asked him. "We have flourishing unions in America, and we figure that we are a long way off from being ruined."

"Ah, but your workers are educated," he objected, thrusting his hands between the waistband of his linen slacks and the comfortable bulge it surrounded. "Here it is fatal to make any concessions to a union. To give way on any point is at once interpreted as a sign of weakness. There is no discipline from the moment that a union succeeds in forcing an employer to give ground. And without discipline, industry will collapse."

I found that his outlook was representative of the attitude held by a high proportion of employers. Unfortunately, it is not merely an expression of prejudice. Trade unionism in India, like democracy, is an alien doctrine which has

been adopted whole-heartedly without being more than dimly comprehended by the vast majority of those who extol its virtues.

"What is the answer to this conflict between the prodigious increase of trade unionism and the profound distrust it arouses among so many employers?" I asked Joseph, a portly Goanese Christian, who as salesman for one of the largest firms in India sees an immense amount of what goes on in the textile industry.

He gave an oddly falsetto giggle for a man of his weight. "That's a difficult question. Would you like to see how one progressive mill is trying to solve it?"

"I sure would," came my eager response.

"Then let's see what we can arrange," said Joseph, lumbering over to his office telephone.

He asked for a number in the city's business section, and after a long conversation he turned to me, beaming. "That's fixed," he exclaimed, rubbing his hands. "It will be a few days though before I can take you along, because as a rule the firm doesn't like visitors, and the Labour Officer will have to secure the approval of his directors. But he's confident that it'll be all right."

It was, in fact, two days later that he called to take me to a cotton mill where raw cotton is processed through all its stages from the bale to finished fabrics ready for sale.

Had anyone told me that I could spend an entire morning in a cotton mill, and enjoy it, I should have had some difficulty in repressing mirth. A cotton mill, whether in India or elsewhere, is exactly like another cotton mill in all major matters; and each and every one of them consists in the main of innumerable reels and wheels spinning at high speed in an atmosphere of floating fibres. In practice, curiosity proved stronger than a natural aversion to complicated machinery and earsplitting noise.

The Labour Officer of the company told me about the lines the mill was working on before his assistant and Joseph

escorted me round the works ; and it was a desire to see how the programme he outlined was progressing that kept me on the job.

In all, the factory employs some fifteen hundred men and women. The man responsible for their welfare and for relations between them and the management has spent his life in the business. He has travelled all over the United States and Europe. He speaks English as if it were his mother-tongue. His outlook and manners are those of the cosmopolitan. But he knows and understands his own people and their problems because he started work in the same mill as an apprentice and struggled his way up to the post of spinning master before he was promoted to his present status.

"What is the biggest problem of industry to-day ?" I queried.

He ran his fingers through the crisp, greying hair at his temples, and replied, "As we see it, the essential problem is that relationships within industry have changed. The old relationship of workers to a single employer whom they knew as an individual has largely disappeared. In its place we have to build up the feeling of pride in the factory and comradeship with other workers."

"What about unions ?" I pursued.

"That is not an easy matter," he confessed. "Unions have grown too rapidly, in a way. Their members have had no experience of trade-union methods and many of their leaders have such a deep-rooted instinct to fight authority in any shape or form that they do so even in cases where conflict is against the best interests of those whom they are supposed to represent. Fortunately, successive Central and Provincial Governments have made wise provisions to meet the danger. Compulsory arbitration is of very real assistance."

"But surely it is bitterly resented ?"

"Yes, it is," he assented. "And I agree that it conflicts

with the collective bargaining which is the orthodox, trade-union weapon. But in this company, and other progressive firms, we are using the breathing space provided by the Industrial Relations Legislation in trying to bring about a community of interests which will enable us to dispense with the purely legal sanctions. We believe that if we can hire men and women on favourable terms and then ensure the right sort of contact between them and the management, we can evade the type of friction which leads to open disputes."

"Do tell me the recipe, so that I can pass it on to the folks back home," I laughed.

He smiled. "Perhaps we are being over-optimistic. But so far results are good. We have very little trouble."

"How much is that due to conditions here being better than in other mills or other branches of industry in India?"

"I don't know," he replied thoughtfully. "Indeed, to be quite honest, you open a new line of thought. It may well be that when all other concerns have adopted similar methods, we may not have so smooth a passage."

"Suppose you outline the present approach, please," I demanded with great interest.

"Certainly," answered the Labour Officer politely. "In the first place, we insist on a minimum degree of education for every member of the staff. Whatever job a man or woman is engaged for, he or she has to attend the apprentice school for three months before being placed on the production line. Literacy is a 'must.' The standard is not exacting—we would like to see it far higher—but every employee must be able to read and write simple Marathi. Men and women are paid the same rate for the job irrespective of sex. There is no discrimination of race, creed, or caste either at the time of hiring or during a person's subsequent career with us. If a man shows promise, we will pay for his training for a senior post, and if necessary send him abroad to get the best technical education at our expense.

Those are the basic lines of our system. We are trying to make joint committees of workers and management practical and efficient. Also, we find that engaging several members from the same family wherever possible is one of the best ways of keeping down absenteeism. However, those are secondary aspects."

There were various other "secondary" items on the labour relations side which he did not mention during our conversation. One of them was a house magazine, and a very smart and well-produced little journal it proved to be. The only thing that puzzled me about it was that it was printed in English! Every man and woman in the mill may have been able to read simple Marathi, but it is a tricky question as to how many could read English at all.

On the main issues it proved impossible to get any confirmation from the men and women at the machines. The girls dissolved into gales of mirth whenever they saw me walking towards them. To this day the source of their immoderate merriment is a mystery. It was beginning to worry me, and make me wonder whether I had inadvertently applied lipstick to my nose instead of my mouth, until I noticed that none of the men reacted in the same fashion.

Perhaps, after all, it was merely my dress which amused them, for despite machinery they all wore the sari. Many of them had rings on their bare toes, heavy bracelets on their wrists and ankles, and circlets in their pierced ears and noses. One of the most striking features of the mill was that every woman did wear the national dress, but hardly a single man did so. It was a perfect illustration of a trend which increasingly impinged on my notice throughout the industrial and heavily-populated areas of the country. At a time when nationalist manifestations in all other fields are being carried to the point of the ridiculous, nationalism in male dress is in eclipse. A flutter of dhotis may appear at

weddings, funerals, and other ceremonial occasions ; but for workaday purposes they are rapidly disappearing from the streets and workshops of Indian cities.

There was an encouragingly friendly air throughout the works. In each department the manager joined our party to answer my queries, but his presence did not occasion any change of mien. The women still giggled, and the men affected unconcern.

At intervals along the clamorous corridors of spinning and weaving sheds stood a series of well-polished receptacles. They seemed strangely incongruous and devoid of any connection with the rest of the equipment. It was not until one of the male hands turned his head and ejected into one of them a stream of betel-juice, with the accuracy of a lizard picking off a mosquito in flight, that I recognised them for what they were.

Joseph must have caught my somewhat startled glance.

"You'd better explain the cuspidors, I think," he commented to the assistant labour officer. "I suspect that our visitor is rather surprised to find so many of them in a factory."

"Well, I couldn't help wondering what workers in an American factory would say if they turned up one fine morning to discover rows of spittoons around the plant," I admitted.

Our guide chuckled. "It must seem peculiar to you, but those spittoons represent a major triumph. Only a short time ago the men used to spit all over the floor all hours of the day. We installed the spittoons, and now it is an exceptional thing if a man doesn't use them."

Perhaps the experience of that factory can lay the foundations of a flourishing business for some enterprising industrialist of the new India. With it as an example, he might be able to induce the Central Government to fit spittoons to every lamp-post, and at all street corners. If he made a place in mass production of these cuspidors, there ought to

be a fortune in it. And if business fell off when every town and village was supplied, it ought not be too much to expect that a grateful country should pay him a pension—if only in recognition of his contribution towards making possible a great amplification of the tourist industry.

But spittoons apart, the factory was beautifully kept. In each department one or more hands did nothing but remove waste and generally keep the floor space tidy.

"Some people have laughed at this firm in the past," said the assistant, "because of what they regard as a foolish fad about cleanliness. They are now beginning to realise that it pays in more ways than one. In the first place, it has a direct effect on production. Workers do more and do it better in a tidy shop. In the second place, it helps to develop pride in the factory and therefore the relationship we are trying to establish."

The works' canteen was somewhat rudimentary by Western standards. It was too small to seat the great mass of employees, so boys were engaged to take food round to the departments on trays. But as Joseph so rightly pointed out, it was a canteen; it did provide meals at non-profit rates; it did enable workers to have a hot meal in their half-hour break for tiffin.

In one corner of the ten-acre site covered by the works was the nursery where children of labouring mothers were housed during the day. It was full of plump, little brown bodies. They seemed to think that the arrangements were first-rate. The smallest among them slept, or lay and kicked on immaculate cots. Older toddlers played contentedly with their toys on a large rug. And the seniors, approaching the ripe age of six, were accepting, and apparently enjoying, kindergarten lessons from teachers employed by the company to run the classes.

A well-equipped surgery, with a fully-trained doctor in charge, was adequate to care for normal illnesses or injuries among the staff. The assistant assured me that in the event

of more serious trouble the employees were sent to a hospital with all expenses paid.

On the works' notice-board were announcements about the activities of the company's sports club.

"You have a thoroughly up-to-date organisation here," I remarked as we neared the end of the tour. "Quite truthfully, I didn't expect it to be anything like this."

"Oh yes," Joseph broke in. "It measures up to anything in the West in everything but output."

The manager of the department we were passing through at the time assented wryly. "We do our best, but we can't get the new machines we want. We have had some for this section on order in both England and America for months and months, but for one reason or another we simply can't get delivery."

"It's not purely a matter of machinery," said the assistant labour officer sadly. "It's partly a matter of mechanical aptitude among our people. They just haven't got an instinctive feel for machinery in the way some other races have. It's not to be wondered at, really. Most of them are entirely new to the work when they come to us, and besides, the majority are of peasant stock at only one, or at most two generations removed."

"That's true," the manager agreed. "I know I was very pleased last year when I succeeded in getting some of the men to tend two machines at a time. That was quite an advance. But when the firm sent me over to America, I found one operative handling fourteen machines of the very same type. It sounds incredible, but I saw it with my own eyes."

"What did your staff here think about it when you told them?" I asked, with a grin.

"Oh, they didn't say much," the manager replied cheerfully, "but it wasn't hard to see from their faces that they thought I was the biggest liar in India."

"Exactly," submitted Joseph dryly. "They thought



you were a liar. So would most other workers in India. And unfortunately, your experience was not exceptional. Much the same contrast in production holds true between our workers and those of the big industrial countries over a whole range of goods. Try to say so, and you are either blackguarded by representatives of labour, or accused of sabotage by national optimists. When you try to get it into their heads that we shall never meet all the targets that are being set up for us unless we can raise the level of our industrial efficiency a long way above where it is now, they just turn a deaf ear."

"Doesn't the difference in wage levels help to even out the efficiency discrepancy?" I inquired.

"It helps," the assistant volunteered, "but it can never meet the situation fully unless there are very big rises in the West. You see, the minimum wage here now is a hundred rupees a month, including a dearness allowance. If you take that as worth nearly thirty-five dollars, or eight pounds sterling, you can see that we mustn't have too big a gap between our standard of output and those of more industrially advanced countries if we are to compete with them in world markets."

"And don't forget," Joseph added, "that this is one of the better works of its kind. There are dozens which don't come anywhere near the same standard."

That visit was not typical of the Indian cotton industry, any more than the cotton trade is a reflection of industry as a whole. It does, however, serve to indicate some of the progress that has been made and is being made, as well as the problems which will one day have to be faced by those who envisage India as the workshop of the East.

Right now, Indian industry is going through a sticky patch. Many of the concerns which are being established at the moment are being run by what are known in Britain as "spivs." They are all out for a quick killing while the

sellers' market lasts. On the other hand, men who have the knowledge and experience to lay down plants with a reasonable prospect of developing them into genuine assets to the nation, are holding back to see which way the political wildcats are going to jump before they invest capital.

Sooner or later the question of private enterprise or state-owned industry will have to be settled. It may well be one of the major issues at the first general election in modern India. But whichever way the decision goes, it is a certainty that if the plans for expansion in all manner of industries are to be implemented, India is going to need far more capital than there is any sign of her being able to find internally. Heavy overseas investments will be essential to put substance behind the dreams. In addition to the money, there will be the problem of translating finance into the tools to do the job, and of training the men to handle the tools.

For some years ahead, Indian industry may be hard put to it to compete with more efficient mills and factories elsewhere. That does not alter the fact that eventually it will have to do so or bust. When that time comes, as it appears inevitable that it must come, Indian industry will be fighting for markets against the countries from which it will, in the first place, have to obtain the machinery for its own development. So far there have been no major obstacles placed in the way of Indian industrialists buying equipment from the West. Will that continue with the expansion of Indian potentials?

The really big problem facing the new India as far as industrialisation is concerned, is where to begin. There are embarrassingly many directions in which progress would be valuable.

India is not bursting with natural wealth on which to found innumerable industries. Her deposits of iron ore and bauxite are of world importance. So are her supplies

of manganese, magnesium, and several other basic metals. Coal deposits are probably adequate for the foreseeable future, though generally of inferior quality. The same is true of a wide range of other minerals such as limestone, industrial clay, phosphates, nitrates, feldspars, and rare earths. But there is another group including petroleum, copper, lead, tin, zinc, sulphur, potash, and mercury for which India will have to look to overseas markets. Among organic raw materials, India has plenty of cotton; but there are few other agricultural products which contribute materially to the existing export trade or show promise of doing so on a large scale for many years to come.

Of course, partition has presented India with one starting-point ready-made. That is the jute industry. The division of the country into the independent states of India and Pakistan hit at the industry which has always made the largest contribution to exports. In the year 1945-46, jute fibres, in the raw and as manufactured goods, were worth nearly thirty-two per cent of the total exports of the sub-continent. When the line was drawn between the two states in August 1947 it neatly cut the growers off from the manufacturers. All the jute mills are in Calcutta or just outside. Every one of them lies within the boundaries of India. Three-quarters of the acreage under jute is in Pakistan.

Obviously, manufactured jute is the stuff that shows the profit. Pakistan was not happy about the reduction in its share of the wealth to be extracted from the industry. She smacked on a tax on all jute crossing the border for processing. There was a glorious mess. The mills were starved of their raw material. The jute growers came near to complete starvation as well. Pakistan had gone into action in November to secure its share of the loot; and in December 1947 the Indian Government proclaimed Pakistan foreign territory for purposes of customs duty on exports of raw jute and jute manufactures. Prices went crazy and

the transmission of funds to meet the prices went crazier still. When a Calcutta mill paid out for a shipment of raw jute from Pakistan, the money disappeared into the Foreign Exchange Department of India. It did eventually reappear through the corresponding department on the other side of the frontier, but only when grower and mill-owner were nearing apoplexy.

The position has somewhat eased since that time, but the jute industry of India still gives a communal shudder at the mention of Pakistan. As far as Calcutta is concerned, there is no uncertainty as to which is the most urgent item on India's industrial plate; it is to so develop the growing side of the jute trade, within India's own frontiers, that her nervous system will never again be subjected to a like strain.

The Governing Body of the Indian Central Jute Committee is firmly convinced that the operation can be carried out satisfactorily. What makes their scheme more attractive to those whose interests are wider than the jute business, is that the Committee insists that the necessary expansion can be achieved without taking over land needed for food or other essential crops. Part of the increase, it is argued, could be obtained by using better seeds and better methods of cultivation on the lands already under jute. They provide a quarter of what is required. Research is being pushed ahead to find out what improvements can be made in yield, and what varieties are best adapted to planting in areas not at present under cultivation.

Sir Datar Singh offered one hopeful suggestion at a special meeting of the Governing Body called to consider the question in December 1947 when the chaos was at its worst. He estimated that two million bales of jute, half of the output of Pakistan, could be raised in India by inter-cropping early varieties of jute on land devoted exclusively to the growing of a particular type of rice.

As there is an insistent world demand for gunny bags, and

jute packing material of all kinds, the temptation to devote a great deal of thought and capital to safeguarding India's stranglehold on a major share of the trade is immense. Late June 1949 indicated how wise it would have been for everyone concerned to yield to temptation and like it. The threat by Pakistan to withhold her raw jute from India and to sell it elsewhere, is a reminder of how precarious has become the foundation of that major industry.

Outside interested circles, however, Indian opinion seems to be chiefly influenced by more exciting new ventures than by the bolstering of established industries. It is the selection of priorities for such new departures that will cause the headaches.

Enormous strides were made by the Indian steel industry during the Second World War. The industry, which is in effect the Tata company, had been moving forward steadily even before the outbreak of war. From the day the firm, founded by the enterprising Parsee, Jamsetji Tata, produced its first ingot of steel in 1918, it had widened its range of products to increasingly high quality materials. That process had reached the stage of high-tensile steels. It was from the Tata works that the steel came for the construction of the Howrah Bridge at Calcutta, which rates as the third largest cantilever span in the world. War-time necessity gave the drive a vastly increased urgency. Armour plating, stainless steels for surgical instruments, special grades for aircraft bombs, and permanent magnet steel for electrical work poured from the plants, in a variety which has effectively blinded the majority of Indians to the fact that India as yet produces only about one per cent of the world output. They see visions of vast automobile, locomotive, and machinery workshops, based on the steel foundries, acting as the supply centre not only for India but for the whole of the Far East.

Steel from Indian factories was used for military purposes during the last war. It must therefore be assumed that it

measured up to the requirements and specifications of the armies for quality and workmanship. But the Indians themselves have a word for their own manufactures ; it is " kutchha." Roughly translated, it means " rotten." At the height of petrol rationing in Delhi during the war, a bicycle became a necessity for most people ; and as imports had ceased, it was of necessity an Indian bicycle. Its tube steel frame dented on contact with wooden cycle-racks, and one of the pedals worked off in the road after one week's use ; which explained why a second-hand British cycle was priced at anything up to double the cost of a new Indian cycle.

Clearly that bicycle cannot have been typical of all the goods made from Indian steel. If it had been, an infuriated army would probably have partitioned the country earlier and more thoroughly than the politicians managed it. But it was enough to leave a lingering doubt about the wisdom of India advancing too rapidly and confidently upon the path of building all her own transport vehicles.

Another phase of industrialisation that has widespread support and has attracted the attention of the Government of India, is the exploitation of those minerals which can be converted into inorganic fertilisers. Agriculture certainly needs more fertilisers. They are not readily to be obtained in world markets even if India had the funds to buy them. So schemes for fertiliser plants appeal strongly to all advocates of industrialisation.

Processing of indigenous food products offers a big field. India has become self-supporting for sugar in the past two decades instead of being dependent upon processing facilities abroad. But consumption is still ridiculously low and capable of tremendous expansion.

Manufacture of fine chemicals and dyestuffs has its warm Indian supporters, who point out that the key position these materials hold in modern society makes it dangerous and

humiliating for a nation of India's size and importance to be dependent upon outside sources.

Imports of machinery and paper are an irritation to some Indians. They would like to see factories for making machines and machine tools springing up all over the country, and a big increase in the number of paper mills. They argue that in so far as paper is concerned, India has already had enough experience to prove that she could make herself self-sufficient. They emphasise with justifiable pride that in at least one respect India's paper-makers hold a world lead. It is the only country in the world which has successfully exploited the use of bamboo fibres for the job.

So it goes on throughout the entire range of existing industries and industrial potentials. Discordant voices cry aloud. Some are impelled by personal interest in particular trades or facets of national life. Some are motivated by ideas of prestige. Some are influenced by considerations of strategy. In the last category, for example, fall the majority of those who would like to see a large share of investment in industry devoted to the rapid development of power-alcohol plants. They advance the wastage of by-products from the existing sugar factories, and the utilisation of capacities for making potable liquors which are likely to become redundant with the spread of prohibition; but their impetus comes from the fact that the wheels of India turn, or fail to turn, on imported petroleum products.

Amongst the clamour of voices for diverting India's industrial effort in this or that direction are a few which reiterate, with wisdom and persistence, that whatever goes by the board, India's cement industry must continue to enjoy the measure of support it has had from the government in the past. Easily the most cogent of the reasons put forward in support of that view is that in the final analysis, all industrial development will succeed or fail in direct ratio to the improvement of transport facilities.

Dreamers may dream dreams of an India serving as the workshop of Asia and the Far East ; the practical man looks to a domestic market as the sure foundation for his industry, with export consumption as an added bonus. That domestic market cannot develop unless the villagers have a standard of living which will make them customers for many things they now neither need nor want. Raw materials must be taken to the new factories and finished goods distributed from them. In each case the answer is better transport ; better transport to encourage the villages to send their produce to market and increase their production of cash crops ; better transport to bring the potential customers into touch with the goods they will buy ; better transport for supply and distribution all round.

India's railway network is not superlative. Far too many hundreds of miles on main routes are single-line. But on the whole, the network covers all main focal points and is capable of expansion to meet the needs of the country for a long time ahead. Where the shortage is acute is in highways. There are not enough first-class roads to act as feeders to the railways, or as traffic arteries in their own right.

Perhaps the soundest starting-point for the intended industrialisation of India would be to plan for the laying down of thousands of miles of trunk roads. To make the great, new highways all concrete would be expensive, but there is no sensible alternative. India has no asphalt ; so the choice would lie between metalled roads, asphalt roads built with imported material, or concrete roads using the product of an industry already established and thriving. Asphalt roads rule themselves out automatically ; and for modern traffic, metalled roads are not good enough in any climate. In India, the combination of monsoons and heavy trucks plays havoc with road surfaces. So concrete highways are a necessity.

The idea of promoting the introduction of the new industrial age by building roads is not one that will commend



itself to the majority of Indians. They are not in the mood for the slow and painstaking steps it envisages. They hope for an efflorescence as dramatic as that of their own jungles after the first seasonal rains.

They won't get it.

## CHAPTER VIII

### SOCIAL DEATH

"THE snag with these folks, ma'am," said the young American officer, "is that there aren't any you can talk to. I came on assignment to this command just bursting with the milk of human kindness and readiness to get on with the Indians. But they've curdled the milk on me. Half of them are so gosh-darn polite it's an insult, and the other half are so all-fired arrogant that I feel like pushing their faces in."

The boy was a flier on the war-time route over the Hump from India to China. He was taking time out at Delhi, and he was feeling pretty lonely. We had been introduced at a dinner party in Maiden's Hotel, and it was inevitable that we should be drawn together for conversation on life in general and the drawbacks of Delhi in particular.

His strictures on Indians were not fair or just, but they had that degree of truth in them which make such statements damning.

"Wait until you've been here a bit longer," I chaffed him. "I figure that you can find many charming Indians to talk to if you try hard enough."

"Mebbe so." He shook his head doubtfully. "I guess not. Back home I used to reckon that the Limeys in India were jest naturally stuffed shirts, and that when I got over here I'd get along with the local guys like I would with anyone I met on Main Street. Boy, I had it to come! Now I'm darned sure that if they keep me here long enough I'll get exactly like the British, only more so, and never see an Indian from one month's end to another, except on business."

It would be interesting to take that young Captain back to India to-day. He would have a lot of fun. He would find that his partially-justified reproaches against the Indians have lost their validity. There were Indians, lots of them, who oozed a spurious politeness of a subservient character. It probably concealed an attitude of mind rather than expressed it. There were also many whose determination not to be subservient tempted them into a manner of speech which, from a man or woman of a different race, would have been resented as rudeness. Most of those types have vanished. That is easily the most pleasant and encouraging feature of the social life of the new India for anyone of an inquiring frame of mind. By saying that, I am sticking my chin right out.

On my return to Bombay for the first time since independence was achieved, I asked a veteran Englishwoman cheerfully, "How is the social life here these days?"

My exuberance was duly chastened by an icy, "There is no social life."

It did not take long to find out precisely what that dampening sentence meant. From the point of view of the European (this term also includes Americans and British) communities, whether resident or transient, changes and innovations have been so sweeping in the past two or three years as to demand a complete reorientation of outlook. My informant was one of the unfortunates temperamentally incapable of carrying out that radical alteration in mental approach. When she said, "There is no social life," she spoke nothing more nor less than the truth—as far as she was concerned. But for me, what she regards as social death is only a translation to a different and infinitely preferable life.

The day of the endless succession of "prestige" parties is over. European hostesses no longer vie with one another to see which of them can hold most frequently gatherings of quite unwieldy dimensions. Social life in the old India

was an experience. There was never a dull moment. If one liked people and liked meeting people, it had enormous attractions. But it would be downright untruth not to admit that a lot of the parties were enjoyable solely because they became a series of subsidiary functions within the body of the main one. The big shows were just too big. If the guest could find a group of congenial companions and "hive-off" with them into a corner, he or she had a thoroughly bubbly evening. Most people did this, so the system went on working happily; but it did include an element of the gamble.

Nowadays, there are few functions on a scale remotely comparable with those of pre-war, or even of war-time, in most parts of India. Nobody can afford it—at least not Europeans. The result is that what entertaining is done, is usually carried out on the more modest scale which makes for greater intimacy. The death of the sumptuous and ostentatious has brought about the resurrection of the dinner party at its best, with a handful of guests of kindred interests, or outlooks so varied as to bring to the table the vitality of contrast.

Apart from the question of cost, large-scale parties in some districts have been hampered by regulations forbidding the serving of food to more than twenty-four guests, whether in a private house or a public place. The idea is supposed to be to conserve food. In practice, the restriction does not save food at all. The individual or firm anxious to entertain large numbers of guests can do so. It is illegal for meals to be served to more than twenty-four guests in one party. It is not illegal for meals to be served to two or three parties of twenty-four apiece; so if, by some fortunate coincidence, each of the parties in one hotel or club happens to be given on the same night by two or three close relatives, or two or three directors of a single company, it is not illegal for members of the different groups to meet socially when the dinner is over.

The same restriction applies to cocktail parties. No snacks of any description are allowed to be handed round with the drinks if there are more than twenty-four guests present—not even a sausage, or a nut, or an olive for “blotting-paper” purposes. If a host is reported—servants in private homes often tattle to the authorities for extra pocket money—to have disobeyed the regulation, he has to pay a heavy fine. And the host would never really know who had betrayed him. Because of such rules and conditions, cocktail parties these evenings consist of twenty-four people or under and they can merrily consume all the snacks they want. If the hostess has some “duty” guests to scratch off her list, she gives another such cocktail party the following night. And so life goes on to beat the ban!

A dozen reasons exist for the transformation which has taken place and is still taking place. Not the least of those reasons is the steady march of the Government of India and the provincial governments towards total prohibition. No sensible observer has any doubt that such is the eventual aim of the Indian leaders. All that remains to be settled is the pace at which the move will be carried out; but already it has resulted in “dry” days for public places several times a week in a great many areas, and restrictions on the sale of spirituous liquor to private consumers. Even the flourishing Black Market cannot adequately meet the demands of individuals, hotels, or clubs.

That alone is enough to take the gilt off the gymkhanas. A lot of gin flowed over the bridgework every evening in the old days. It was not a matter of drunken orgies or anything like that. It was simply part of the ritual of life for the foreign element in India to meet before dinner at the club for conversation and company. Most of them felt very much like the young captain I had met in Delhi. They did not speak the same language as the people among whom their lives were set; and the regular contact with their

compatriots was an essential feature of their lives if they wished to maintain their sanity.

In some respects the gymkhana, or club, was very much like the corner drugstore in a small American town. If those who frequented it drank chotah-pegs instead of coca-colas, they did so with much the same motive. They went to meet their friends. Naturally, as the majority of the club members were British, they demanded libations of alcohol. That was reasonable enough, for without stimulants they would probably not have got beyond the stage of discussing the weather before it was time to break up the party and disperse to their respective homes for dinner ; which would have been incredibly boring since the weather in India operates on a fixed schedule and does not provide anything like the conversational openings it does in England.

Besides, that first drink after the sun goes down has long been established as one of the necessities of life in India, and for that matter all over the East. It is the stimulant after a long day in the heat and dust. It is the aperitif. It is the prophylactic against the myriad infections. It is part of the European pattern of life in Eastern countries. Medical evidence may prove that the stimulus is transient and largely illusory ; that alcohol in any form has an adverse effect upon appetite ; that not one of the bacteria, bacilli, or bugs is in the slightest degree inhibited by alcohol ; but it will have a job proving this to the nine out of every ten foreigners who have lived for long in India. If bereft of every other ground for their belief in alcohol, they will fall back on the unanswerable argument that they think it does all they plead in its favour, and that doctors are generally agreed that the right mental attitude is more than half the battle in sickness and in health.

Just as the local drugstore customer has a pretty shrewd idea who is likely to be around, and is fairly sure that there will not be strangers present, the foreigners looked forward to relaxing in an atmosphere in which, if everybody was

not entirely friendly, each was on terms of equality. I do not believe that more than one in a hundred of the whites in India in pre-independence days would have had the slightest objection to the admission of selected Indians to club membership. The problem was the question of selection. Most Indians made them feel uncomfortable either by undue humility or overbearing assurance. Only a minority could be encountered with the same ease as fellow-strangers within the gates. So to avoid difficulty, many of the clubs erected what amounted to a total colour bar, the maintenance of which eventually developed into a fetish.

India is in no mood to tolerate exclusion of her citizens from any activity upon her own territory. The edict has gone forth that clubs and similar organisations must open their doors to all races without distinction. That has shaken some of the old hands so badly that they will probably be in a palsy for the rest of their days. The very foundations of their world have cracked asunder; and their resentment at the methods adopted to bring about the change has planted in some of them a deep and lasting bitterness. The Indian attitude is not merely understandable; from the European's point of view, it is something less than justice.

At the same time, Angus, who despite forty years in India has retained a flexible and resilient mind, emphasised that it would be unjust not to recognise that there were faults on both sides in the past.

"We're not all Poona pundits, lass," he said, filling a leisurely pipe. "I mind a case when I was stationed in the Nilgiri hills that bears me out on the argument I want to put to you. We had a fine wee club, and in the days when I was first posted there it was open to all comers, British, Indian, or what-have-you. Well, it carried on like that very happily for years, until one night we held a dance. That was when the trouble began. Like most things, it grew out of next to nothing. One of the Indian members

asked the wife of one of our officials for a dance. She turned him down. From all I could hear, she did it very gently and politely, and I can assure you from personal experience that he wasn't the only partner who didn't have the pleasure of a dance with her that night, for I had asked her to join me in a waltz myself just before the Indian approached her."

Angus sighed and went on, "The truth of the matter was, though none of us knew it at the time, that she felt far from well. We realised why months later when she went home to have a baby. But the damage was done the minute she refused to dance with the Indian. He was furious, and utterly convinced that he had been deliberately snubbed because of the colour of his skin. There was a scene, an unpleasant and humiliating business for everyone. And the upshot was that at the next committee meeting it was proposed that membership should in future be restricted to Europeans. Some of us argued for the proposal and some against it. Lord knows which way it would have gone in the end, if the husband of the girl who had caused all the bother had not intervened. He got up and demanded to know why we should open membership to the Indians. He reminded the committee that although the Indian members attended regularly and expected to be partnered by the British members' wives and daughters at the club dances, not one of them had ever brought along his own womenfolk. That turned the scale, and the members in favour of excluding the Indians won the day. It's all very childish and stupid, but then anything which is decided by emotion and not by reason is bound to be illogical. That's the way we're made."

"And how do you feel about things now, Angus," I asked, "when all clubs are being invited to admit anybody who wishes to join, with the alternative of being virtually forced to shut down if they don't accept the invitation?"

He shrugged and took a deep pull on his pipe. "It's



just a case of emotion taking the place of thought all over again, but on a bigger scale and the other way round. It's just as foolish and just as understandable."

Not all of the European community take the changes with the same good grace. Some, indeed, have become so jaundiced in their outlook that they interpret every action taken by the Government of India as being prompted by the solitary motive of rubbing in the fact of Indian independence. That is perhaps the commonest view among foreign residents of the pressure applied to clubs to force them to admit all nationalities.

It may be the right explanation. Flares of something rather like Zenophobia are probably not to be wondered at, at such an early stage. They are India's way of telling everybody else that she is mistress in her own house. Unfortunately for her, everyone else has long ago accepted that, and consequently finds her insistence upon the point either embarrassing or insulting.

This may be hard to swallow, but it is absolutely true that the Bombay Government in particular is solemnly taking steps to close down any social or sports club which does not conform to a request to open membership to all races. The motive for that one is not far to seek, of course, but it does seem disproportionate in the present circumstances. A reasonable parallel would be if California launched a programme to stop the Chinese residents of San Francisco from having social gatherings unless they agreed to allow all races to join them; and launched it at a moment when the United States as a whole was fighting with an economic depression much worse than anything that had ever happened, or was likely to happen.

If all the Europeans in India could bring themselves to look upon the temporary touchiness and peculiarities of the Indians with fairness and tolerance, these minor differences would soon sort themselves out. Alas, there are all too many who are utterly unfair. It is probably not a

matter of malice, but merely of temperamental incapacity to grasp the fact that times have changed ; and that every non-Indian remains on Indian soil on sufferance. That is something their minds simply will not and cannot grasp.

In acute cases, this affliction can lead to some distinctly funny ends. There was the conversation I overheard at the Bombay Yacht Club, of a lady of uncertain years and even more uncertain temper.

It was apparent from her remarks that she claimed the protection of the United Kingdom Government, though neither her appearance nor accent was conspicuously Anglo-Saxon. She was inveighing vigorously against everything the new India had done, was doing, and planned to do. Each feeble protest by her male companion brought a fresh outburst, culminating in a rousing attack on the *British Government for allowing such things to happen.*

Her friend objected that, even if the Indian Government was all she had called it, the government in Whitehall could hardly be blamed for the misdeeds of Delhi.

The curiously unBritish Briton went redder in the face than ever. "Blame them ! Of course I blame them. Who else is there to blame when they threw away all our rights here in return for nothing at all. And as for their precious independence, it wouldn't take very long to make them see sense if our people were prepared to do something about it."

"But what do you suggest that London should do ?" queried her companion.

This continued resistance to superior wisdom, and unreasonable demands for practical suggestions, had the worst of effects upon the indignant lady. She inflated like a pouter pigeon. "Do ?" she exploded. "There must be thousands of things they could do if they wanted to. What about all the sterling balances ? If they froze them, or whatever it is they do, that would soon bring them to their senses."

Such a wealth of indeterminate "theys" and "thems" was more than a little confusing at the time ; but the degree of venom imparted to each, formed a fairly accurate guide as to which of the possible recipients the pronoun was intended.

Her fury is not representative of the European communities in India. It is, however, of a type found often enough to render understandable the dictum that there is no social life. The changes which have already taken place, and are taking place every day, are nerve-destroying to those too set in their customs and ideas to be able to adapt themselves to a new régime. And it grieves me to admit that in most cases the worst offenders are women. Men, whether from laziness, moral cowardice, or sheer lack of interest in the social side of life, appear to be surmounting the obstacles of change with considerable ease and grace. Certainly, when objection and criticism become vocal, they are normally expressed in feminine tones.

A small party of us were having dinner in one of the better-known hotels. In its palmier days the establishment catered for society with capitals clear through. Some Indians ate there from time to time in past years, but they were either Princes, or commoners so indecently wealthy that all anyone could see was the aura of gold which surrounded them. For the rest, the custom was drawn from the higher ranks of the Indian Civil Service, and the prosperous European and mercantile communities.

Whatever else has changed, the quality of the food has not. We were enjoying an admirable meal, and amusing if not very brilliant conversation. In fact, as Mark put it, "If only we hadn't picked a 'dry' night and could have been able to have a bottle of wine, or even some beer, this would have been perfect."

Our peace was penetrated by a woman's voice. It was the kind of voice guaranteed to pierce through almost anything. It annihilated space, and cut through the hum of other voices

with consummate ease. "Robert," it protested querulously, "I think you might speak to the management about it."

What poor Robert replied is lost to mankind. Perhaps he did not reply at all. It would not be surprising if he did not. Men who are married, or otherwise attached to such voices, not infrequently develop in self-protection an infinite capacity for hearing all, and saying nothing.

"Don't be so spineless," the voice went on. "You know quite well that it would never have been allowed a few years ago."

A further interval of relative silence. Robert must have plucked up courage to suggest that a good many events had supervened in the few years referred to, for the next assault was delivered half an octave higher and with a greater volume than before.

"It's an absolute disgrace," boomed the voice. "If the management is forced to allow such types of Indians to come in here, it might at least insist that they eat like civilized human beings."

There was more in the same strain. Occupants of surrounding tables glanced furtively at the voice, and Robert, and at the party of four at the next table who had obviously given rise to the comment. I think the other watchers felt much as I did myself. If it had been possible to slide silently and swiftly out of the room without attracting to oneself any of the attention of the company, a considerable section of the occupants would have disappeared. But it was obviously impossible and they went on with their meals, trying not to look in the direction of the source of that effortlessly persuasive voice. Waiters wove their paths among the tables, watching with close attention as they crept along, the gyrations of imaginary butterflies. The manager dodged in and out from behind a screen at the farther end of the room like a corpulent and elderly jack-in-the-box. In fact, everybody but the principals was thoroughly uncomfortable—as uncomfortable as the central figures were at ease.

Robert's affliction was obviously aware of the battery of covert glances directed towards her and was revelling in the sensation while maintaining an outward expression of indifference. The two young Indian couples who had fused her tirade were superb. It is incredible that at least one of them did not know perfectly well what she was saying. The chances are that all four understood every word. If so, they were ornaments lost to the theatrical profession. Not a flicker of an eyelid, or a modification in the tone and level of their light-hearted chatter, indicated comprehension. It was an example of forbearance worthy of the widest emulation.

Unfortunately, Indians as a whole are not given to ignoring real or imagined affronts. Perhaps as assurance grows, they will be less prone to find offence where none was intended ; but for the present they are easily needled. It behoves the stranger to move and speak with the utmost circumspection if he or she wishes to avoid friction ; all of which does help to make the social life difficult.

On the other hand, excuses can be found even for the minority of Europeans who are rude and intolerant. Their world has been turned upside down in a period of months. In post offices, banks, shops and other public places, they are not infrequently subjected to displays of bad manners and rudeness which they would not be called upon to tolerate in their own countries. To someone revisiting the country, the petty annoyances and near-insults inseparable from existence for the foreigner in India to-day are not serious. They fall into perspective as disproportionate expressions of an attempt to live down a tradition of servility. But to those who have not been able to assume the position of sitting on the outside, looking in, they must be galling to the point of fury.

Differences of custom are always hard to reconcile. It is purely a matter of habit and opinion as to whether the Indian fashion of using the fingers and a portion of chapattie

to convey food to the mouth is superior or inferior to the Western method of using table utensils. If India had never been under Western rule, foreigners there might be duly grateful to be permitted to adopt their own mode of eating in public places. As it is, they can hardly be expected to look upon it in that light, when for a century or more the accepted manners of the Indian upper classes have been modelled upon the ways of the dominant power.

Nothing could be more natural than the determination of the national and local authorities to break down the segregation which has long been an established feature of life in Indian cities. But it is a policy in the execution of which undue haste can be harmful to the international repute of India, as well as to the susceptibilities of those who must in future learn to regard themselves as tolerated guests.

In all countries, even those with a homogeneous population, there is a measure of segregation. Sections of the people with varied social customs congregate in more or less clearly divided zones, and are the happier for it. In India, that was undoubtedly carried to excess in the past, but too rapid a campaign for its reversal can lead only to friction. For example, Indians of all classes seem to be able to enjoy, or at least to bear without discomfort, a degree of noise which tears Occidental nerves to shreds. The incessant music, on instruments and scales which sound like unorganised discordant uproars to the average Western ear, arouses no trace of resentment when it continues day and night in purely Indian areas. There may be immense differences of social status between the residents of the area, but they are all attuned to that aspect of their own culture. It involves no disparagement that someone from America or Britain should find the same sounds so intolerable as to constitute a menace to health and sanity.

Illustrations could be multiplied endlessly. There is the question of the Indian throat. It is a peculiar organ

excessively afflicted, apparently, by catarrh. Anyone who has lived in the country for any length of time can testify to the alarming symptoms to which it gives rise. The bazaars and narrow streets of Indian cities and towns are the places to observe the phenomenon at its most virulent. At all hours of the day and night, the air is liable to be rent by hawking and explosive expectorations so violent that the newcomer is swiftly convinced that the lining of the Indian throat is composed of either leather or metal. It sounds impossible for passages of ordinary tissue to be so tortured without dangerous hæmorrhage following at once. Many of them clear their throats as though they were answering the challenge of a hungry panther. However, for every Indian custom which causes alarm and distress in Europeans, there is bound to be one which occasions in the Indians an equal revulsion or distaste.

Whatever else the efforts to destroy racial segregation in India may achieve, they have contributed immensely to the decay of the old style of social life—they and the fantastically steep rise in the cost of living working towards the same end. One of the outstanding features of life among the Europeans of India in pre-independence days was the prevalence of private entertaining. Whatever one's interests, it was a certainty that a social person would be invited to a cocktail or dinner party at least six evenings a week at which there would be some kindred spirits and congenial conversation.

Margery and Jane were justly famed during the war years for the skill with which they selected guests. It was about all they had in common. Margery is redeemed from utter ugliness only by the mobility and expressiveness of her face ; her features are too boldly modelled for her to be described as beautiful. Jane, on the other hand, is a walking contradiction of her name.

The pair were together when I encountered them on a city street during this year's visit.

"Do you both still entertain as much as you used to?" I asked.

"I think I can answer for us both, and for most other women as well," Jane replied sadly. "We do very little entertaining these days. Come round to our flat any time and you'll find out why. We simply can't ask anyone to come in, unless we know them so well that we can let our hair down in their presence."

"You know, my dear," murmured Margery thoughtfully, "I'm not at all sure that we aren't being too sensitive about the whole business. After all, we're not the only people who have had to move into an Indian block."

Jane shrugged. "It's perfectly true that hardly anyone can afford to keep a bungalow going as they used to in the past, except of course the officials of the diplomatic services and those people who receive very liberal allowances from their firms."

"But the average European is in more or less the same boat as ourselves," Margery broke in. "We may think we're pretty badly off, but it might be a lot worse."

"Hmm, I suppose you're right," admitted Jane, "but Charles would never forgive me if we had some important guests to dinner and they had to eat in a cloud of visible ghee fumes from all around, let alone inhale the strong smells of Indian cooking which seep in from adjoining flats."

"Is that your main worry?" Margery asked. "Our bugbear is the din. In the very hot weather, it's absolutely intolerable. One gramophone going non-stop would be bad enough, but it really hurts when you get six or seven of them all playing different screeching tunes at the same time, night and day."

"I think we could bear with the cooking smells," said Jane, "if the personal habits of our neighbours were less disgusting." She turned to me. "I don't want you to think that we're broke or that we're living in some sort of



a slum, Dorothy. As flats go, ours are supposed to be about the best in town, and the bulk of the rest of the inhabitants are members of the learned professions and the rapidly-growing Indian middle-class."

"That doesn't make the slightest odds," Margery interrupted. "The noises and smells don't vary all that much from class to class."

"Neither do the peculiar habits," Jane assented. "The other day while I was on our verandah, an Indian came out on to the balcony of the flat opposite. I happen to know the man, and to know that he is very well educated and fairly well-off. He leaned over the balcony, put his fingers to his nose and trumpeted, nipping off the mucus with his fingers to fall down into the street below, and then wiped his hand on the wooden rail of the balcony. That's the sort of thing one sees among the coolies wherever one goes in the East, but it wasn't what I expected to see happen from the balcony of what is after all a block of high-class, expensive flats." She shuddered at the memory. "Ugh. It nearly made me sick at the time, and merely talking about it has made me feel squeamish all over again."

"I sympathise," I commented, "and I'm sure I'd have felt much the same as you did. But I have had it put to me that we're guilty of highly unpleasant practices by blowing our noses into filthy pieces of cloth which we stuff back into our pockets, so converting ourselves into walking germ-traps."

"What a horrid thought," exclaimed Jane, wrinkling up her face.

"It's pretty rough," Margery agreed, "but even accepting the implications at their face value, it still makes our habits out to be considerably less anti-social. However regrettable it might be for us to walk about acting as unpaid incubators or fostermothers to influenza germs, we're at least keeping the germs to ourselves. We aren't spreading them all round the street."

We parted, and I made my way back to the hotel in which I had finally found lodging after fruitless efforts to locate a flat or a bungalow at a rental within the bounds of reason.

Both of my old friends had treated the subject somewhat light-heartedly ; but there is very little reason to underestimate the handicaps which may arise to endanger India's future from such apparently trivial causes.

The masses and the middle-classes of the new India are all in favour of any measures which help to freeze out the foreigner. Only a few of those at the top of the social and political trees realise that for a good many years to come, India is going to have real need for experts and technicians of various kinds. They will have to be from the United Kingdom or some other part of the Western world.

As matters stand at the moment, the recruitment of new members for the *corps d'élite* to hold key posts in India is going to be extremely difficult. In the old days there were compensations for service in India for adventurous youngsters or for older experienced men. Pay was relatively high compared with standard rates at home ; and with the general level of Indian wages low, the engineer or doctor, the administrator or lawyer, the diplomat or businessman, was able to live at a standard which compensated for a climate that took a heavy toll of vitality, and for the diseases it was virtually impossible to escape.

Not the least of the attractions for living in India was the highly artificial and somewhat hectic social life. Never have I seen men and women work so hard at enjoying themselves as they used to do at the clubs and hotels all over India in the years before independence. But that glamour is fading fast. The last bubbles are winking into extinction on the surface of the champagne. All that will remain will be a rather dull white wine, or rather, at the present rate of progress, a flat ginger ale.

Frequent references are being made in the local newspapers to plans for the total elimination of horse racing all over the country within the next couple of years. So it looks as if there will shortly be nothing left of the programme which used to occupy the spare time of the European community, except golf, tennis, cricket and such sports, at mixed clubs.

That might not matter greatly in the world of to-day. Our poor old globe has had such a shaking that there are plenty of young men and women of all races who will not miss too much the lavishness of a glittering and frivolous social life. They will, however, miss those amenities which formed a potent magnet for specialists by enabling them to ignore the mechanics of existence.

In the days when a well-paid domestic servant received thirty-five rupees a month, salaries of foreigners did not need to be unduly high for them to be able to maintain a staff of dimensions fully equal to the job of making life run on ball-bearings. Nowadays the picture is changed beyond recognition. Rents have climbed to ridiculous heights, and a thriving Black Market in accommodations exacts premiums beyond the reach of men drawing what would once have been relatively fat salaries. Unskilled labour now expects and gets anything up to a hundred rupees a month, with chauffeurs and other semi-skilled workers commanding a further twenty rupees or more. As a result, the income which in the past would have provided a pleasant home with ample staff and all the concomitant luxury, is now barely enough to sustain a degree of comfort equal to what a man could have in his own country. What makes the situation even more difficult is that the Indian still expects the European "to keep face" in the same style as before, irrespective of his bank account, or to be more exacting, his overdraft.

The tragedy of it is that nobody is any better off for the changes. The bearer and the amah may be able to extract

some moral satisfaction from higher rates of pay, but they do not live in better houses or eat more and better food.

To a great degree, social death has replaced social life for the average European in India. It is indubitably so as far as the "old kohai" is concerned.

For younger men and women and newcomers there will be compensations; and the brightest of them will be the vastly more cordial relations between ourselves and the Indians. In the future, men of goodwill can look forward to an era in which the complaint of the young Army Captain will no longer hold good. They will find plenty of Indians to whom they can talk. I certainly have done so.

## CHAPTER IX

### MARTIAL MUSIC AND TRAVELOGUES

FOR a people consecrated to the paths of Mahatma Gandhi, the Indians are showing a remarkable degree of pride in their Armed Forces. No one who wants to see a peaceful world is in the least likely to criticise that aspect of the outcome of independence ; but it is rather interesting to note the change of tone which has taken place in Indian printed and public utterances on the subject of their defence forces. Nor is the new realism limited to friendly press references and laudatory speeches by politicians. India is devoting a very large share of the national income to the maintenance and improvement of these forces. In the Budget for 1948-49, nearly as much was set aside for defence as for the combined civil needs of the country. The exact proportion was 121 to 136.

At the time of partition, about one-third of the defence forces went to Pakistan and two-thirds to India. Both of the new states were extremely short of senior officers in the initial stages, since the number of Indians who had reached high rank under British rule was relatively limited. However, there had been a big advance in that respect during the Second World War, with the result that the new Indian Army was able to function with the assistance of a negligible number of British officers who had stayed in the service to train their successors. The same is true of the Indian Naval and Air Forces.

It might have been expected, and indeed it was gravely feared in more than one quarter, that the Gandhian doctrine of satyagraha, or non-violence, would lead to Indian abjuration of the employment of Armed Forces. It has not, however, worked out that way. The Indian Government

has firmly taken the view that the defence forces of a nation are an unalienable part of the national structure in the world of to-day. It is a view which has already saved India from destruction. Only the existence of the Armed Forces prevented absolute chaos when communal rioting swept the country immediately after partition. Clashes over the future of the princely states could also have brought all governments to a standstill throughout the sub-continent, but for the defence forces. And it was the presence of the Army which made possible the suppression of the R.S.S. (Rashtriya Sewak Sangh), or the Hindu Extremists.

The role of the defence forces, and particularly the army, may be more important still in the near future. India is faced with precisely the same problems as brought havoc upon Burma. She is lucky in having them in less acute form, chiefly because she never suffered from a Japanese invasion. As a consequence of her deliverance from that fate, latent frictions did not develop into open hostilities as they have done in Burma; and sectional struggles have been kept within reasonable bounds by the continued existence of a government capable of commanding greater force than that at the disposal of potentially rebellious elements.

That is a stroke of luck for India, and for the rest of the world. Nature abhors a political vacuum as much as a physical one, and as much as the Imperialists of the Kremlin adore and seek to promote it.

All the attacks levelled at the Indian Army in pre-independence days might have suggested that the disappearance of the British would have resulted in the dismissal of officers who had served and trained in the Indian Army of those days. In practice, the army has retained the same officers and much of the same outlook and tradition. It is now, as in the past, the loyal servant of the Government of India. Its morale, always high, is, if anything, higher than ever. In spots it may be a little too high. During a Forces

Week function that I attended this year, an Indian officer whose rank and age should have prevented undue overconfidence told a crowded hall that the Indian Army was strong enough to resist any invader who might attack.

If that Brigadier was thinking of Burma, Ceylon, or Pakistan as the potential aggressors, his claim was undoubtedly accurate. But none of those three is really likely to figure in the role of invader of India ; so it must be presumed that he meant his statement to be taken at its face value. It would be comforting to believe that he would be right in all circumstances. Up to the present, it would be to seek comfort in a delusion. It may not be so in the future.

The British officers who built up the Indian Army would probably be gratified if they could return to that country to-day to see the trends which are making themselves perceptible. The phase of slovenliness and poor discipline that followed the change of political control is passing. India's Commander-in-Chief, General Cariappa, is showing himself true to his training and experience as one of the first Indians to attain senior rank under the British. Officers and men are being encouraged to take pride in being smartly turned out. Those officers who aped the British by smoking briars, find that they are unpopular if they outdo their mentors by strolling down the street with their pipes jutting out arrogantly when in uniform. Slouching with hands in trouser pockets is crisply discouraged. Army bands have been informed that popular film tunes, even if Indian, are not as suitable as marches.

Back to business "as usual" is very much the order of the day for the Indian soldier. He is told that, while he may take an intelligent interest in the affairs of the nation, politics are not his business. He is there to serve the government and the people, in peace or in war.

To some extent, the legacy of denigration does seem to be hampering the Armed Forces. A notification published early this year by the Defence Ministry said that the old

system of recruiting on the basis of fixed percentages from various classes of the community is to be scrapped. The official reason given was that the move is designed to eliminate communal and class differences so as to make the army representative of all the nationals in the country. It is a good reason ; but in view of the experience of the Second World War, it is not entirely convincing.

Up to 1939, the Indian Army was small and its recruits were drawn from a minute fraction of the total population of the sub-continent. Almost all the two hundred thousand officers and men came from families with a history of military service ; and most of those families belonged to one or the other of the famous " martial races "—Sikhs, Rajputs, Jats, Punjabis, Muslims, Pathans, and the rest. With the Japanese eruption to the very borders of India, recruiting, which had already been immensely speeded up and widened, was thrown open to all comers. Bengalis, Madrasis, and men from every corner of the country and from every walk of life poured into the ranks to raise the total strength of the Indian Army to over the two million mark. And very good soldiers they proved to be. The war even brought about considerable modifications of the territorial structure of the Indian Army.

In the light of that, a modicum of scepticism is permissible at the solemn declaration of the Indian Defence Ministry that no particular class of Indian nationals will in future be debarred from the privilege of serving in the Armed Forces. It seems more likely that the demand for recruits tends to outrun the supply. It is certain that some of the traditional sources have at least partially dried up. The havildars and havildar majors of the old Indian Army who used to see to it that their sons followed in their footsteps, lost some of their influence with the end of the British Raj. They had been men of moment in their villages. For one thing, the retired soldier, passing rich on his pension and the family land, gained further in the esteem of his descendants and



neighbours by being, in their eyes, a man of quite exceptional wisdom. In the course of his army service he had been given a fair amount of education. He had travelled. He enjoyed the confidence of the Government. And almost invariably he had a profound and outspoken contempt for the "talk-wallahs."

Now the "talk-wallahs" have triumphed. The old soldier is discomfited and discredited. His village sends fewer of its young men to learn to handle a rifle.

In another respect, the changed dispensation has had the effect of accentuating the very tendency which the Defence Ministry has announced itself eager to combat. The army is short of officers. Not enough young men are coming forward for training to fill the ranks. But of those who do come forward, a disproportionate number are from the East Punjab, Delhi, and the United Provinces.

There are several possible explanations. The first and simplest is that these areas include many men of the traditional "martial races." If that is the true explanation, it would appear that the military tradition dies harder among families of higher social standing. That may well be the case. The peasant families which bred the sepoys and non-commissioned ranks had no knowledge or understanding of politics. It follows that for them military service was literally the service of the King they had never seen. Severance of the direct link with the King through British officers would therefore mean virtual destruction of the tradition. For the families of the holders of either King's Commission or Viceroy's Commission, the situation was rather different. They were well enough educated to be in touch with the movements of the day. They knew that the Oath of Allegiance might be to the Crown, but the dispensation of the army rested with a government of increasingly Indian character. They knew, too, that the great majority of the Indians who filled the Indian Civil Service were, overtly or covertly, as enthusiastically nationalistic as any of the Congressmen who

sought to establish their future careers by courting frequent terms of imprisonment. So when the change-over took place, it came as neither a surprise nor a disappointment.

A second explanation for the preponderance of officer recruits from the East Punjab, Delhi, and the United Provinces, is economic pressure. They are all in the zone which has felt most acutely the impact of the mass migration of refugees out of Pakistan. It is notoriously more difficult to find openings for men of some education than for the farmer. He is his own boss again if a stretch of land can be found for him to cultivate. The man who has lost his roots in the soil is a more difficult problem. He has a higher standard of living and a much more restricted market for his talents. So the influx of refugees, including many of the land-owning class whose sons might have received a fair degree of schooling, must have increased the competition for the few available white-collar jobs. Under the same heading of economic pressure comes the declared hostility of the Congress Party as a whole towards the zamindari system. The zamindars, or land-owners, and their families will doubtlessly fight hard to retain their rights of land ownership ; but there must be many among the younger generation who are looking around for some other and more promising source of livelihood.

Whatever the reason for the restricted sources of new officer material, it is causing some concern in the Indian Army of to-day. No less an authority than the Director, Selection of Personnel, Army Headquarters, Brigadier Bilimoria, has stated publicly that if other provinces do not respond to appeals for more young men to train as officers " the evil of martial and non-martial classes, which has been eradicated, will creep in again."

To the American mind, this concern about where the officers come from seems, at first glance to be a trifle academic. If the foreign rulers found no grounds for concern in drawing officers from restricted groups, there

does not appear to be any urgent reason for alarm to an independent government.

The simple answer, and it is an answer that cuts two ways, is the fear of nepotism. Brigadier Bilimoria indicated one aspect of that fear in his discussion of the failure of other provinces to provide the necessary officer recruits. He said, "Perhaps the selection system has given rise to certain apprehensions in the minds of the people. But now, the chances of favouritism or the varying standards of universities are eliminated by the introduction of an examination by the Federal Public Service Commission, and the merger of all the recruitment boards into two selection centres, which will be changing its personnel very often."

It is sad, but true, that Indians still do not trust each other too much. They have good reason. In India, as in most other countries of the East, the family is the unit of society and a man's first loyalty. The interests of the caste come second and the clan third. There are plenty of exceptions to the rule, but the exceptions among Hindus do not form a high enough percentage of the total for it to be generally accepted that loyalties other than those sanctified by custom can have an overriding validity. Officers and selection boards may in fact be actuated by considerations of the well-being of the service. That will not prevent other motives being attributed to them.

From the Indian Government's point of view, it is undesirable that the army should be officered too much by restricted groups. Circumstances might arise in which there would be a direct clash between the interests of the nation at large and the groups from which the army's officers are drawn. If the sections providing a high proportion of officers became imbued with aims and ideals in conflict with those of the political leadership of the country, the ultimate sanction of the government might be lost.

To get down to cases, it could be dangerous to India to have too many Sikh officers. In army matters, the Sikhs

have an importance out of all balance with the size of their community. At the outbreak of the Second World War, Sikhs made up fifteen per cent of all enlisted men in the Indian Army. At that same period, Muslims formed thirty-six per cent of the fighting strength of the army. If Gurkha volunteers from the independent Kingdom of Nepal were disregarded, the Sikhs therefore constituted nearly one-third of the non-Muslim troops of the Indian Army—an astonishing figure for a people of five million souls.

Wholesale recruiting during the war years drastically changed the picture. It may be that the army of the new India is much less dependent on the valour and tried qualities of the Sikh fighting men. But no one with eyes in his head can fail to see in India to-day that there are still very large numbers of them, both among the enlisted men and among officers.

The Sikhs are a unique people. In race and general appearance they are exactly the same as their neighbours of the Punjab, whether those neighbours are of the same section which embrace Islam and are now known as Punjabi Muslims, or whether they are the Hindu Jats. All are fine men of good physique, considerably taller and sturdier than most Indians. Part of their advantages no doubt arises from the fact that, before partition, they lived in one of the few districts of the sub-continent which was normally a surplus area for food. Part may also be due to their diet. They eat wheat, millet and pulses, to a far greater extent than the rest of the country. As a result they have a more balanced diet than the rice-eaters of, say, Bengal or Madras.

Religion, and religion alone, has set the Sikhs apart from their kinsfolk of the Punjab. It was founded by Guru Nanak who was born in 1469. About the time that Martin Luther revolted against the Roman Catholic Church of his day, Nanak led his followers in dissent against Brahmanical Hinduism. His teachings reflect the major tenets of Islam as well as of Hinduism, for in its pure form the Sikh faith

is monotheistic. Nowadays Sikhs can be seen joining happily in the Hindu festivals of Dusera, Devali, and the rest, but they have sacrificed none of their individuality. They still regard themselves very much as a chosen people ; and their fidelity to the rule of abstaining from the use of razor or scissors on their beards or hair from birth to death, makes them conspicuous. It also, presumably, helps to keep tight the bonds of community.

At the time of partition, the Sikhs suffered inordinately. Those sufferings have created discontent ; and discontent could easily grow into active opposition when sown among a people who maintained their independence against the Indian Empire of the Moghuls when it was at the peak of its power under Akbar the Great. Should it, in the future, flare into open revolt, the presence of a disproportionate percentage of Sikhs in the army could be a serious matter for the Indian Government. It is unlikely that the Indian leaders have ignored the implications of the revolt of the Karens in Burma.

It should be carefully noted that the discussion of the possible future position of the Sikhs within the Indian Union is purely hypothetical. Nothing that has happened so far has given any reason for thinking that grave friction will arise. It is advanced only as the simplest illustration of the danger which might arise from unrepresentative recruiting for the Armed Forces. At the moment, Sikh officers are getting on very well indeed with their Hindu colleagues. Certainly there was no suggestion of strain between a Sikh Second Lieutenant and two other young officers of equal rank who dined at the same table with me in the restaurant car of an express train in 1949. The only potential strain appeared to be on their capacity for whisky.

I was deep in a magazine in the dining car when the trio entered and asked whether the other three seats at the table were engaged. They were an interesting group. Their spokesman was a Signals Officer of the Indian Army. His

uniform was as impeccable as his English. Behind him lounged a moustachioed officer of the Bhopal State Forces, whose manners subsequently proved to be at variance with his untidy appearance. The third was a Sikh, looking singularly unwarlike despite his jungle-green battledress, probably because of sweeping eyelashes and eyes as brown and melting as a spaniel's.

All three were on their way to take a three-month course at Mhow, once a cantonment for the British Forces in India and now a big training centre. They were bubbling over with high spirits, and displayed a most flattering disappointment when I declined to join them in a round of double whiskies ; and after a second round were prepared to talk cheerfully on any subject I raised.

Their only grievance in life seemed to be the normal one of pay. Both the others were openly envious of the Sikh who had just returned from sixteen months of active service in Kashmir. They teased him about being the plutocrat of the party, since on active service he had been saved the expense of finding his own quarters. There seems little doubt that the recruiting of officers would be easier if they were paid on the same basis as enlisted men. Other ranks are fed, housed and clothed, at public expense and are paid at half the rates for civil servants of the same grade. Officers do not receive the same privileges ; and they complain that, while they receive the same dearness allowances as their opposite numbers in the civil branches of government service, they are actually worse off because of frequent moves. But the three were agreed that the army was the career for them.

Part of their devotion to this profession sprang from the knowledge that for some time to come there is likely to be plenty of room at the top for young men of ambition and intelligence ; an even larger share had its origin in nationalism. They were typical of the younger generation of Indians who are profoundly convinced of the brilliance of

their country's future. If anything, they suffered from an overdose of geopolitics. Like the rest of their contemporaries, they feel that the world, especially the Eastern world, is India's oyster. It was illuminating to hear representatives of a people, who in the past seldom paid much attention to what was happening outside their own country, talking casually of the need to build up an army strong enough to assist their Asian neighbours.

It should not really have come as a surprise ; for the extrovert outlook of the new India is one of its outstanding characteristics and one of the sharpest contrasts with the past. In bygone days, if Indians did look overseas at all, it was most likely to be in the direction of South Africa where hundreds of thousands of their countrymen had made their homes. Their general attitude to most other countries was that each nation should run its own affairs without external interference. Forgotten, to-day, are the fierce reproaches against all those who seek to influence the paths of others. Now it has become the clear duty of the more fortunate countries, foremost among them India, to guide the steps of less able or smaller neighbours !

Operations in Kashmir had plainly come into that category, as far as the Sikh was concerned. His dark eyes flashed with sudden and revealing fire as he talked of battles fought among the razor ridges soaring a sheer four thousand feet or more and swooping down again three thousand feet upon the farther side to the course of clear, cold streams cavorting down their narrow rock channels, vanishing from sight among grey boulders, and leaping outwards once more, roaring through a mist of spray, into a foam-churned pool.

The soldier glowed with pride and the joy of strife. To me, it was tragic and fantastic that men should be stalking each other with death in their hands in a country I remembered as beauty made tangible. As he spoke of war, I conjured up visions of peace.

There are few more pleasing experiences than to awaken

in a houseboat on Dal Lake, and to see the graceful droop of willows by the water's edge, and the dark, proud columns of poplars reflected in the mirror-like surface glowing with the delicate lemons and lotus pinks of the Kashmir dawn. Kashmiri villages are dirtier and smellier, if possible, than villages in other parts of the sub-continent ; but the people are golden-skinned and cheerful, and so much in keeping with the flower-decked water meadows that one tends to forget their depressing communal habits, and to think instead of the regularity with which their gleaming bodies sparkle in the sun as they splash in the muddy water near the Bund at Srinagar, and beside temple steps.

When the Sikh discussed the problems of fighting high up in the hills of the Himalayas, I remembered a camp on Mohanmurg where the chief joy was to sit in the late evening as the sun went down about ten o'clock at night and watch the pageant of the peaks to the east, with Mount Haramac towering above his snow-clad companions. The lower ranges, with thick pine forests skirting the Sind Valley, were shrouded in obscurity ; but the higher peaks were floodlit by the golden glory of the declining sun, disappearing one by one as the slanting rays slid over their crests, until Haramac's head glowed alone against the royal sky, like a cloud given form and substance.

When a dining-car conversation starts in India, it is apt to last quite a time. The reason is simple. No member of the party can get up and walk back to his coach. To have a meal it is necessary to climb down at one of the stations and make one's way along the platform. The return journey is made after the same fashion, in the fullness of time. The rest of the trip is spent in the ship's stateroom-on-wheels, with two or four berths, which is the commonest form of compartment in either first or second class, or air-conditioned coaches on the Indian railways.

By the end of my encounter with the junior ranks of the Indian Army, I had gathered a great deal of information



about them and about their families which might never have come my way from other sources. Like most people who have spent any length of time in India, I had heard of the five "K's" of the Sikh; *kes* or unshorn hair, *kachh* or short drawers, *kara* or iron bangle, *kirpan* or knife, and *khanga* or comb. But until that day I had not realised that at least two of them, apart from the knife, had martial significance. The young Sikh officer explained that the long hair, rolled round steel rings, used to form a most effective precursor of the tin hat; and that the steel bracelet he displayed beneath the cuff of his battledress was all that remained of a series of such bangles which, in the days of long ago, protected the sword arm of the Sikh warriors.

The Signals Officer provided a remarkable illustration of the strange intermixtures of India. He said that his ancestors had at one time followed the Sikh faith but that his family were now Hindus. He added that his grandmother had installed the Grant Sahib, or sacred writings of the Sikhs, in her private pantheon of Hindu deities, and worshipped it impartially with all the rest. It is doubtful whether her innovation met with the full approval of orthodox Hindu authorities. But she sounded a formidable old lady, well able to relegate to his rightful place any pandit who might be rash enough to cross swords with her upon the matter.

It was a pleasant interlude in the twenty-eight-hour journey from Delhi to Bombay; one of the few interludes, because there were only two occupants of my four-berth cabin; and the elderly Englishwoman and I decided it would be wiser for us to take turn about in leaving the carriage for meals. Theft has always been one of the bugbears of rail travel in India. Since partition it has become infinitely worse. The railways seem to have attracted the attention of all the lawless men who made such fat pickings from luckless travellers in the brief reign of chaos. Even the air-conditioned coaches, with their double-glass windows

hermetically sealed, and solidly bolted doors, are not proof against the ingenuity or brute force of the marauders. So we took turn about to visit the restaurant car while the other picnicked in the carriage.

Apart from the enhanced risk of pillage, occasionally accompanied by assault or murder, rail travel has not changed ; nor does it look as though it will change much for a long time, if only because the carriage of passengers is the least important of the functions of the Indian rail system.

Virtually the whole of India's forty-odd thousand miles of rails were built for the express purpose of transporting goods ; and for more than twenty years they have come increasingly under the direct control of the government. Well before independence became an immediate possibility, all important routes were owned by the state and managed either by it directly, or by companies operating under its instructions. As a means of conveying goods, they have been a great success. The virtual elimination of regular famines under British rule was almost entirely made possible by using the railways to distribute available food. All of India's export trade has grown on the movement of produce by rail. As a result of all this, provision for passengers has remained austere although passenger trains now account for roughly half the annual mileage.

First- and second-class coaches are much alike except for a more generous allotment of space in the first-class ; both have leather-covered benches stuffed with uncompromising material upon which the traveller spreads his own or a hired bedding roll ; both have lavatories and wash basins in each separate compartment, which are not kept as clean as they could be. And third-class carriages would make good cattle trucks but for the wooden benches which dissect them. But perhaps the discomfort of the furnishings of the third-class coaches does not matter since there always appears to be at least as many passengers clinging to the

outside, or squatting on the roofs, as can have forced themselves inside. Whenever an Indian train starts upon its journey, the bare boxes of the third class are packed to overflowing with wildly-excited human beings and even more excited livestock, mostly chickens. Crates of chickens are used as emergency seats. Baskets of chickens jammed together with their legs bound, and prevented from squeezing each other out only by netting drawn firmly over them, are balanced on their owners' knees, or heads, or for that matter on the knees or heads of their travelling companions.

Somehow, in spite of congestion which would defy anyone else to do more than breathe with difficulty, an Indian family party stacked upon each other in the gloomy interior of the third-class compartments always manages to find room for a charcoal stove, with the result that a blue haze of cooking fat filters between the bodies massed around every aperture.

Packed as it is at the start of the journey, the train will be met at every station by a frantic horde hurling itself towards the coaches as if intent upon immolating themselves before the modern Juggernaut. At each station the recurrent miracle will be performed. The train will go on its way leaving the platforms denuded of their human freight, save for the percentage on every Indian station which appear to be encamped awaiting a train due the week after next.

As for what goes on inside the carriages, it is perhaps wiser, to avoid any charge of prejudice or exaggeration, to quote a special correspondent of one of India's leading newspapers. In an article on the need for higher standards on the railways he wrote, "After squeezing themselves into the boxes, how do they behave? They spit inside; put both their feet on the seats, or force their feet (with chappals on) on the opposite seats, without realising in the least how revolting it is to the fellow-travellers who sit opposite. Again, there are smokers nonchalantly blowing their smoke on others, while others close their eyes in self-defence or

contort their faces in annoyance or disgust ! And what of those who blow their nose out of windows in running trains ? What of those who spit ' pan ' inside and smear ' chunam ' on the back of seats ? " Far be it from me to challenge his conclusions !

It is the onslaught of these battalions that makes night stops into nightmares. The uproar almost penetrates into air-conditioned carriages, and makes sleeping in ordinary first- and second-class impossible.

As the railways to-day are carrying twice the pre-war number of passengers with something around fifteen per cent less passenger-train capacity, prospects of radical changes are negligible. What have changed already out of all recognition are the travelling habits of those who used to fill the first-class accommodations. Nowadays, unless they are transporting a lot of luggage, they fly.

Indian airways have made tremendous strides in the past few years. They can challenge comparison with the finest in the world for safety, for comfort, and for civility. It is a delight to go to the air centres and find oneself treated as a valuable customer and not as a regrettable interruption to the more important affairs of life.

Service of one of the Indian airway companies goes so far as to offer prospective travellers a booklet of assorted information. It is a publication that deserves a wider reading public, if only because its facetious text and drawings occasionally achieve a humour of a rather different nature from what is intended. Two sections specially pleased me. The first has a delightful naivety when one remembers that it is printed—in English.

To our male passengers who left school at six and are not too hot at reading, we make a request. Please don't force your way into the Ladies' Cloak Rooms at the various airports on our routes. If you are in doubt, the thing to do is to hang around, for sooner or later someone will want to see a man about a dog and that will be your clue. If it's

a man, follow him, if it's a woman, you take the other door. We regret we are not permitted to paint a lady on one door and a gentleman on the other, as this is a railway monopoly in India.

The second merits quotation on several grounds.

And last but not least we have our Hostesses. They say a mother's love is born above, but to our minds the relationship between our girls and our passengers is something more celestial. We, who are unmoved by moonglow or a sunset of mad colours; we, who never lose our *savoir faire* when film actresses enter the room—where our Hostesses are concerned we dip gently at the knees and doff our caps. What woman could look after twenty-one passengers as if they were her own children! Feed them, clothe them (blankets only), laugh with them (natural laughter) and sob softly (without being Russian), when a passenger is in the mood for sorrow. Our Hostesses have been selected after weeks of trial and pleasure (for "pleasure" read "error"). Fine specimens of radiant womanhood, we leave you in their safe hands and ask but one favour—see that yours are as safe . . . in India men have been known to kill to protect the honour of a sister.

With such titillating propaganda to tempt them, it is not surprising that Indians and Europeans alike who have much internal travelling to do, are moving about the country more and more by air. Also, the saving in time is enormous; not merely because distances in India are considerable, but because even the express trains move at a relatively leisurely pace. And air travel costs no more over long distances if one takes into account the incidental expenses of rail travel. For example, a single journey by air from Bombay to Delhi costs 175 rupees. The same journey by air-conditioned coach is 161 rupees. The plane trip takes four hours, with the only food required provided by the company. The other lasts twenty-eight hours, and the traveller has to feed himself.

Of course, the railways will always attract those who never move without their personal servants. The provision of separate compartments for bearers accompanying passengers is a custom of long standing on Indian railways. It is one that has often resulted in acrimonious arguments, as third-class flocks and the ticketless passengers who are the bane of railway officials all over the country flood into the bearers' quarters. Protests by bearers achieve little, since India is ridden by a snobbery more acute than anything I have encountered anywhere in the world. In a land where the Colonel Sahib's bearer scorns the servant of the Captain Sahib, neither cuts much ice with the most junior official of the railway upon his own stamping-ground. So trains are frequently delayed while exasperated servants summon to their aid the employer whose lightest word will make the train staff cringe. I know. It happened to me years ago, and on my most recent journey I saw it happen again, with a portly and indignant merchant rolling his bulk down the platform to lend massive support to his bearer and fellow-countryman who had been unable to force his way into the servants' section. As in the old days, intervention from above ended in an official check of the occupants, and their ejection.

Apart from those with heavy luggage or servants, the only people who might still find rail travel more convenient than air would be foreigners travelling for nefarious purposes. Nobody at either end of any rail journey is the slightest bit interested in the nationality of the traveller, point of departure or destination. Once the requisite number of rupees for the ticket has changed hands, official interest and curiosity are at an end. By air, the experience is very different.

At the termination of a flight to Delhi, I was about to wander out of the main airport building in search of my suitcase when I noticed that other passengers who had arrived by the same Viking were lining up before a table at which sprawled three men in khaki, with police badges.

"Is this some new formality?" I inquired from a young American businessman in the queue.

"Yep," he replied morosely. "You'll have to produce your passport for a check-over and for registration."

"What?" I cried in dismay. "Do you mean to say we have to show our passports to move from one Indian city to another? We haven't crossed any frontiers."

"You're right," he assented, "but you'll find that doesn't make any difference. They'll sure want that passport all the same."

"But I don't have mine with me."

"In that case, ma'am, you've got one heap of explaining ahead of you," he said cheerlessly.

"Why, it's absurd," I protested. "Nobody said anything about this when I booked to fly here, and I've never had to show a passport on any internal journey in India in my life."

"Uh-huh, mebbe so," he grunted, "but times have changed. We used to be able to come in and out without any bother when the British were running the country, but nowadays it's quite a chore for an American to get a visa to enter India. And any time we move around, we've got to keep the police posted where we're going, why we're going, and how many children our grandmothers had. Didn't you tell the C.I.D. you were coming on this trip?"

This was something new and alarming. Nobody had suggested such a course either at the time of my arrival in India, or at any subsequent moment. Common sense would have dictated notification to the police in the case of a permanent change of address. But such a step in connection with a casual trip had never occurred to me. As a result, it appeared that I had transgressed a variety of regulations. It was therefore with relief that I recollected, as my turn came to face the inquisitors, that by sheer chance I had thrown my passport into my suitcase at the last moment in

Bombay for the purpose of getting a Pakistan visa while in Delhi.

The officials were quite amiable. They waggled their heads and caressed their beards fondly as I discussed the situation ; but they insisted upon my filling up an interminable form. When the last entry had been made, the senior of the three decided that after all, it would be necessary for me to produce my passport ; so the airport bus was held up while my suitcase was retrieved from it and I rummaged through the contents. To crown it all, not one of the trio bothered to look inside the passport when I did return with it.

It was only when we were driving into Delhi that it dawned on me that all the confusion could have been side-stepped. There was nobody to ensure that passengers did report to the police for checking. Had I simply walked out of the building and taken my place in the bus, no one would have been the wiser. Of course, there is a chance that the police eventually compare their reports with the passenger lists, but their manner did not suggest any excess of enthusiasm.

What with the contrast between the requirements of the airport and the non-requirements at the railway stations, together with the lackadaisical methods adopted at the former, there would seem to be a good case for either applying the regulations and warning visitors of their existence, or scrapping them altogether. Why check air travellers and not railway passengers ?



## CHAPTER X

### BAZAARS AND BAKSHEESH

THE Yogi of the old India is gradually giving place to the Bogi of the new ; if such a term is admissible as a generic for bogus soothsayers, bogus ascetics, and hundreds of thousands of refugees, some of whom are genuine but many of whom are as bogus as the other categories. Since independence, the fakirs, whose fame has spread so widely all over the world, and the lice-ridden " holy men " no longer have first call on the public places in India.

Not so many years ago, it was normal, on entering a village, to see a number of figures in the shade of the central tree, usually a banyan. One of them would almost certainly have been a religious wanderer belonging to one of the innumerable types common in the sub-continent. They ranged from the simple-minded old men who dragged themselves painfully over the face of the country so that their fellow-men might improve their chances of translation to a higher sphere at the next incarnation by indulging in the beneficial practice of alms-giving, to the squatting man of staring eyes and scarred flesh who regularly and frequently inflicted terrible injuries upon himself. That would also be the resting place for the man whose spirit had attained such an ascendancy over the flesh that he could hold one arm upright until it withered to mummification.

The village meeting-place is still occupied, but the strangers taking rest there now are more likely to be refugees ; or itinerant letter-writers who inscribe correspondence for the illiterate in the local language or an amazing variation on English—they appear to be in greater demand than ever before ; or vendors of the incredible selections of aphrodisiacs which provide a fantastically high

proportion of the advertising revenue of many Indian newspapers. The preparations of the aphrodisiacs are, of course, disguised. The usual form of camouflage is some such title as "Elixir." The makers' claims modestly speak of the access of vigour and energy to be expected as a result of the effects of the preparation ; but testimonials used by the distributors are much more outspoken. Some go into the most remarkable clinical details, which suggests that the testimonials are phony ; and they guarantee that the goods possess qualities far beyond all that is claimed for them.

The same trend as is noticeable in the villages, is intensified in the crowded cities. The insistent chorus for " baksheesh " which has ever eddied round street corners and in the bazaars has now swelled to a baying uproar. At one time it was confined largely to well-defined professional beggars, most of them maimed, or disfigured by leprosy or some other hideous disease. All these afflictions were exposed to the public eye in their full gruesomeness. Crippled living skeletons, occasionally hired for the purpose, were packed into sugar-boxes-on-wheels like the kids use for alley races, and dragged through the heat and dust of the day to act as a lever upon the susceptibilities of wayfarers. Misshapen children, exploiting their deformities which had in some cases been inflicted on them soon after birth by parents who wanted to commercially extract baksheesh from innocent sympathisers, had a knack of stationing themselves where the passers-by could not fail to witness a carefully-rehearsed pose that made the twisted limbs contort themselves more painfully than ever.

It was an unpleasant but inescapable feature of life in India when I first went to the country years ago. It is stronger than ever to-day ; but the full professionals are just a mere fraction of the total number clamouring for the pity and the pice of the resident. To them has been added a motley collection of able-bodied beggars of all ages and

descriptions. Prominent amongst the new mendicants are Sikh refugees. But only a few of them crouch and hold out a suppliant hand. Many of them have assumed the mantle of prophecy to lend spurious dignity to their begging.

Fortune-telling has always been one of the preserves of the Sikhs who frequent the bazaars and the entrances to leading hotels and shops of the great cities. In many parts of India they held such a degree of predominance in the arts of astrology and its kindred sciences that one might well have thought that the principle of the closed-shop was already established on the sub-continent ; and that this one community had made a corner in the lucrative profession. But at least in the old days, the Sikh fortune-teller gave value for money. His prophecies might not have come true. It would have been a series of miracles if they had, since the brightness of one's prospects according to his revelations invariably bore a direct relation to the amount of baksheesh delivered or expected. And they were pretty shrewd judges.

The swarms in every major city to-day do not always know the patter well enough to impress the merest tyro. It is a matter that the tourist section of the Government of India might take in hand. Everybody in the world has heard of the uncanny powers of Indian mystics ; so every tourist will arrive ready to be thrilled by a good performance. Some of the experts I heard at work in the old days were a national asset. If exploited properly, they could have been made into one of the biggest draws of the tourist business—bigger than Cairo's "gully-gully" men, or India's own experts in making mango trees grow before the astonished eyes of the visitor.

Real artists, like the first of the breed to come my way, would scorn the approach directly applied by the present-day prophets. They would not have trotted along the pavement with cries of, "Fortunate face, lady. One rupee

will tell you what the future holds . . . only one rupee . . . verree fortunate lady . . . best information on past and present . . . just tell birth date and horoscope will show future . . . eight annas, lady . . ." deteriorating, if response failed, into floods of much less hopeful forecasts as to the lady's prospects in this world and the next.

The old artists had the right ideas. They would invest wisely in a bribe to the sahib's or memsahib's bearer for "inside" information. That was certainly the line taken by the extremely able exponent of the profession who called upon me about one week after my first arrival in India.

My bearer gabbled an incomprehensible explanation about somebody wishing to speak with me, and then fled, leaving the visitor to make his own entrance.

A figure in immaculate white ducks and a magnificent turban of deep blue moved to the centre of the room, gave the Indian greeting of a bow with hands clasped as in the attitude of prayer, and slipped cross-legged to the carpet without a word.

"Well? Who are you, and what do you want?" I inquired impatiently.

He must have met that opening gambit pretty often. He spread his hands gently, palms outwards. "I am a humble seeker after truth, memsahib," he murmured quietly. "I wish to serve you."

"That's very nice of you, but in what respect?" I demanded in surprise.

"The greatest service is to give knowledge," he replied. "Many great things are to come to you; that I have seen in your face and in your walk as you passed me on the street. That is why I followed to offer you my knowledge."

"For how much?" I asked sceptically.

He shrugged the jibe off, as one unworthy of him or of me. "If you wish to reward me, it shall be so. What I

know, I know. And what I know, I will tell you. If it pleases you—good. If it does not—good. Knowledge does not change.”

“Now look,” I protested, “I don’t know how you got in here in the first place, but I don’t want my fortune told, and I certainly don’t intend to pay out good money to hear what you have to say.”

“As you wish, memsahib,” he remarked wistfully. “You do not think that I have knowledge.”

“Without wishing to appear rude, you’re quite right,” I rejoined frowningly.

“If I can prove that I do have it, will you listen to me ?” he pleaded.

“I won’t go so far as that,” I responded, “but I’ll have a bet with you that you can’t prove to me that you ‘have knowledge’ as you put it.”

The alacrity with which he assented and suggested a sum for the bet should have warned me off. But it didn’t, and he whipped paper and pencil from his pocket and asked me to tell him the day and month of my birth. On receipt of this information, he sat silently for several minutes while making involved calculations and grimaces. Finally he raised his head and advanced a series of commonplace remarks about my place of birth and similar matters, all of which he might have been able to get hold of from one source or another. He could have even had a pal in the office which handled my papers.

“Is the memsahib now convinced that I have knowledge?” he queried, after some moments of such revelations.

“I’m convinced that you’ve made some pretty efficient inquiries about me before you called here this morning,” I declared haughtily.

“If the memsahib wishes further proof,” he insisted with hurt dignity, “will she kindly write on this piece of paper the answers to what I say ?”

“This caper has gone on long enough . . .” I began.

"But surely the memsahib doesn't want to ignore her bet?" he emphasised smoothly.

"Say listen, I'll give you the money if you'll clear out of here right now and let me get on with my letters," I said, nodding towards the door.

With a wonderful air of injured pride he answered, "If the memsahib won't allow me to prove that I have knowledge, that is her right. She can tell me to go. But what I ask would not take many minutes."

"Oh, all right," I exclaimed irritably, having been adroitly wangled into an unsportsmanlike and faintly oppressive position.

He rattled off a number of questions, and as I scribbled down the answers on the scrap of soiled paper he had pressed upon me, he wrote slowly and carefully on an even smaller piece held in the palm of his left hand. Most of the oddly-assorted requests he made, escape me now, but the last one was to write down a list of six flowers. He then rose and screwed up the little piece of paper in his hand.

"I put this paper on memsahib's table," he commented, and went on, stepping back well away from the table and from me. "Will the memsahib now look at what she has written and at what I have written?"

Allowing for the difference in script, he had produced a perfect copy of what lay in front of me in my own writing. How it was done, I do not profess to know. Perhaps he had annoyed me in order to push other matters out of my head, so that he could indulge in mind reading. If it was guesswork, it was the kind of inspired guessing that should have enabled him to make a fortune at the race tracks. He had even spelled *myosotis* correctly—and that is hardly the sort of flower he saw every day!

My continued refusal to hire him as a pet soothsayer grieved him sadly, I fear, but he solaced himself with the winnings I handed over with an admission that he undoubtedly knew too much for me.

Skill of that standard has now been pushed into the background. But perhaps even the cruder performers of to-day could brush up their methods a bit if the government insisted that foreigners must be shown something good in that line. These types manage to pin down the occasional European; but for all the confidence that even educated Indians put in the casting of horoscopes and the consulting of the stars to find auspicious dates for the carrying out of specific duties, I have yet to see any of them lending an ear to the itinerant wizards. Perhaps they all "have knowledge"—of their countrymen. It could be.

In addition to attracting increased numbers of beggars and near-beggars, the bazaars of independent India give the impression of forming a more important part of the life of the cities. They are larger, noisier, and smellier than ever. All the well-established markets are flourishing still more vigorously, and new ones have sprung up. That is really rather odd. In the old India, there was a sound, superficial explanation for the existence of bazaars. It was that the almost-rent-free premises and the little or no overhead enabled the bazaar-wallahs to cut prices, and to cater for those who had less money to spend than the customers of large, Western-styled shops in reputable areas. Not that it worked out that way if the unwary wandered into a bazaar. Anyone who did not know the ropes and enough of the language to be able to keep tabs on what was going on, would probably have ended up by paying out much more than a respectable establishment would have charged. But on the whole, merchandise in the markets could be bought up cheaply.

That explanation for the vigour and popularity of the bazaar no longer holds good. Nor is it possible to explain the phenomenon by falling back on the cliché about Eastern love of chaffering. Bazaar prices are now fixed, and in nearly every case are fixed at least as high as those of stores with proper premises. Of course, the fixing is relative and

within limits. It is still better to bargain a bit. Too prompt an acceptance of the seller's price takes the joy out of life for a bazaar-wallah. The one remaining advantage, however, is that goods which have become completely unobtainable elsewhere appear on the stalls in the crowded markets.

Refugees help to explain the growth of bazaars. Selling something is an occupation that does not demand special training or experience—not, at least, where Indians are concerned. Wherever refugees are gathered together, and that seems to be in and around every major town and city, some of them turn to the hawking of goods for a precarious living. And as Delhi acts as a lodestone to all the rootless for hundreds of miles around, it has drawn thousands of the dispossessed to beg, bargain, steal, and starve.

They have overflowed from the Old City, with its reeking canyons opening off the broad but swarming wealth of Chandni Chowk; from the crooked, airless lanes a man could span with outstretched arms, that sprawl through the high-piled buildings behind the Jumma Masjid Mosque; from the alleyways that have always been crowded and noisome; and have flooded into Connaught Circus and Connaught Place, the concentric three-quarter moons which form the hub of Lutyens' administrative capital.

At the best of times the diseased and deformed used the shopping centre of New Delhi as a happy hunting ground for baksheesh. But apart from them, only a very few minor stalls encumbered the lofty, colonnaded arcade that flanked the greater part of the circular roadway from which traffic flowed out into the spokes of the Imperial City. The generous pavement between outer columns and shop windows was always in the shade, at one side of the circle or the other; and many of the stores ensured greater comfort for their customers and themselves by hanging reed screens to shut off the blinding sunshine.

If the architect can look down to-day and see what has become of his spacious, well-planned shopping centre in



India's capital city, he must be spinning in his grave like a dervish. Stalls and push-carts of every size and shape have been set up along the wide pavement. What was once a shaded walk where the shopper could stroll at leisure, inspecting the goods on offer and not meeting an insistent salesman, unless he or she went into a store, has become pandemonium. Only necessity would drive anyone to go there now. And one of the Delhi tongas would certainly be needed to drive the reckless adventurer back again, after the excursion, to the hotel or bungalow.

A circuit of this area is to be made only at the cost of exhaustion, brought on by forcing a passage through the jostling, importunate crowds of refugees. Incidentally, the Delhi tonga has not changed with independence, unless the tonga-wallah has become slightly more contemptuous of all road users. It remains the strangest, horse-drawn vehicle ever devised for the torture of the human frame. The driver is not too uncomfortable. Passengers are those who suffer. They sit at the back of a conveyance which is little more than a narrow seat suspended parallel to the single axle, and immediately above it. Of course, there is a floor attached to the seat, and there are sides of a sort. But the wicked ingenuity of the design reaches its finest flower in the so-called backrest. That piece of padded wood is so placed as to chafe against the small of the back ; since for some completely unfathomable reason, the shafts of any tonga are set so high that they invariably tilt the seat backwards. The passenger is therefore faced with a choice between trying to sit upright and being subjected to what feels like a succession of punches on the kidneys, or leaning forward to avoid that fate. The second alternative is usually as comfortless as the first. It is definitely more perilous, since a sudden jerk would send the passenger sprawling head-first into the roadway.

But even a tonga would be heaven after a tour of Connaught Circus to-day. Barely enough space for a single

line of pedestrian traffic remains clear of goods. The austere pillars of bygone days are gaudy with clothing hung from strings tied round them. Outside the shop which was once an exclusive hairdresser's for the fashionable women of the capital, vendors swarm ; and stalls and tables overflow even into the roadway. Once a swathe of crimson carpet used to roll without a wrinkle from the shop door to the pavement edge when the establishment was honoured by the Vicereine. To-day, if anyone were rash enough to try to roll out the red carpet, it would not have a wrinkle—it would have a series of ridges formed by the sleeping bodies sprawled across its path. But probably not for long. The bumps and the carpet would vanish together round the nearest corner at high speed.

All this is a bit hard on the traders who have occupied premises in that shopping area for many years. They have heavy overheads. Apart from anything else, their rents were fixed to cover the cost of spacious quarters with splendid display windows and a covered walk before them. They still have the space ; in some cases they have more space than they have goods to put in it. All the other amenities have gone. Whatever they display in their windows makes little difference. If some of their uninvited guests upon the sidewalk outside have not erected stalls to obscure the whole window, others will almost certainly have spread out their goods so widely in the inward half of the pavement, to be out of the sun as far as possible, that only passers-by with rather exceptional eyesight can extract some idea of what is shown in the shop windows. All in all, the exclusive shopping district of New Delhi, which in pre-independence days catered to the élite and the wealthy, is now just a glorified bazaar.

" Aren't the refugees killing trade for you ? " I asked the Hindu manager of a very fine bookstore there which had always supplied my needs during war-time in Delhi.

" Killing ? " he answered with a smile. " Killing ? That's

a little too harsh, perhaps. Choking trade, yes. But not yet to the point of death."

"Cheap-jacks on the pavement undercutting you?" I pursued.

He shrugged the shoulders of his smartly-cut European costume. "It's not so much the price-cutting. Naturally they can undersell. They pay no rent, no taxes, no staff, so they can easily take a few annas off the price of any book or magazine as compared with our figures. But that part doesn't affect us so much. We have many books for sale that they don't handle."

At that moment the interior of the shop reverberated to a chorus of shrieks and yells which made speech impossible for several minutes.

"What on earth was that?" I demanded when the uproar subsided.

"That's what does worry us," he replied with a graceful gesture of resignation. "My old customers stay away because they don't wish to buy their books where there is such noise and such dirt. These refugees squabble and fight among themselves all day long. Often there's so much disturbance that it's almost impossible to keep our accounts straight. It's too bad that old and respectable firms should be driven out of business by this rabble."

"I sympathise with your troubles," I consoled him, "but I must admit that I'm relieved to find you taking that uproar so coolly. I was beginning to wonder if you had a back-door I could sneak out of."

"Oh, the serious dangers are largely past," he assured me, "though it's true that I never feel happy if I hear one of the Sikh refugees getting into an argument over money with a Muslim. Nothing has happened for months now, round this district, but always there's the feeling that a slight friction might lead to more riots and mass slaughters."

"Did you have much trouble, then, during the time of partition?" I advanced.

"We were closed down for weeks and weeks," he sighed. "After the fighting began, hordes of budmash came in from all round the province and started to loot the Muslim shops. Some of them were simply dacoits and cared nothing as to whether the shops they persuaded the hooligans to break into were Muslim or not. We had to keep our shutters up until things calmed down a bit."

"It all seems hard on you after the amount of work you and your family have devoted to the task of building up the business through generations," I ventured.

"It is hard," he concurred, "but again we've many things to be thankful for. We're so much more fortunate than those poor fellows outside. They didn't want to come here. Many of them had farms or businesses of their own in the north before they joined the four millions who fled over the border after partition."

"You don't blame the refugees for your troubles, then ?" I exclaimed.

"No, but I do blame the government," he affirmed. "They ought to take more constructive action to settle these people. Camps aren't enough. The refugees have got to be given a chance to become useful citizens again. And if the chance doesn't come soon, there'll be plenty of them who will no longer want to have regular, honest work."

In a way, my bookseller had put a finger on the greatest moral and social problem of the new India. She has just not been able yet to absorb the immense flood of refugees who migrated from Pakistan. Millions have filtered down to various parts of the country and are dragging out a miserable existence as homeless beggars. But even in their dispersal there lies some hope ; since they may, individually, pick up some confidence and attach themselves once more to the communal life of their people. It is the section of the refugees still in camps which constitutes the gravest danger and the biggest challenge to the wisdom and energy of the government.

The large, officially-run refugee camps scattered about the country provide a reasonable amount of food for all their occupants. The standard of accommodation is fairly good by ordinary Indian standards. But the occupants of the camps feel themselves cut off. That sensation is strengthened by the normal tendency of the Indian to accept his fate without protest or effort to alter it. Prolonged residence with thousands of others in similar plight cannot result in anything but rapid, moral deterioration.

Quite apart from the social issues involved, the refugee problem is a serious material handicap to India's progress. She must, by reason of the high incidence of wasting diseases, and the very high proportion of very young children among her population, carry an inordinate number of passengers among her crew. It will take decades for even the most vigorous and successful education and medical schemes to make any perceptible effect upon that situation. She cannot afford to add to her burden by maintaining immense numbers of non-productive family units. Refugees in large groups are a menace to the areas in which they halt, save in the cases where they are directly cared for by the public authorities. They add to the chronic overcrowding. Misery, not of their own making, forces down their standard of living to sub-human levels.

Before partition, the majority of Indians existed in conditions of squalor and filth which made natural breeding grounds for epidemics. It did not help that public hygiene was something to which the masses offered non-violent resistance infinitely more effective than the political campaigns of the nationalists. It is to those zones of the big cities which have always been danger spots that the refugees gravitate to drag down the general standard still lower.

The slums of the new India are consequently worse than ever. Yet they too have seen changes of other kinds as

well. Despite the deeper degradation forced upon their inhabitants by circumstances, they share, on religious holidays and festivals, in the furious vitality of a people revelling in marking their independence by celebrating with added fervour their traditional seasons of rejoicing. "Holi," this year, in Delhi, was a vivid example of this trend. It was the maddest, rowdiest celebration the city has seen for many a day.

Holi is the spring festival of the Hindus. Those who can afford to do so array themselves in gleaming white raiment and promptly go out into the streets to join in a joyous free-for-all of hurling and squirting of coloured water at one another. The rest, who cannot afford new clothes, beat the old ones clean on a rock in preparation for this occasion. Every tint imaginable is thrown, if bright enough, but the predominating shade is red. It would be more accurate to say that all Hindu men join in. Women do not. On that event remarkably few women of any race are to be seen in public.

The significance of the predominance of red dye, and the absence of women from public places during Holi, is variously explained. Most of my Indian friends quietly evade the issue when they are asked for information on the subject. Repeated questions to several of them did, however, elicit the statements that the festival celebrates female puberty, and that the red dye is symbolical of blood. One girl amplified this story by explaining that in Hindu mythology a beloved princess who had been abducted, was traced and recovered by reason of a trail of menstrual bloodstains; but nothing of that appears in the Ramayana tales of the kidnapping of Sita by Ravana.

Whatever the truth of the matter, the Indians certainly give themselves quite a party; and it has become wilder since independence. The deity honoured on the occasion is Krishna, one of the incarnations of Vishnu, the preserver of the Hindu trinity. Krishna is usually depicted in Hindu

art and sculpture as sporting with milkmaids. So it all adds up to confirmation of the definition given by Webster—"A licentious spring festival, held in honour of Krishna, especially by the cowherd castes."

As all worthy Hindus revere the cow, they are all presumably entitled to assist the cowherds. They have undoubtedly done so for centuries; and this year the highest in the land joined with abandon in the fun and games which go on from the full moon until five days later.

The opening day of festivities fell upon a "dry" day. But a lot of people must have been saving up against this particular dry day. Religious fervour could have accounted for the intoxication evident in Delhi streets; but it could hardly account for the reek of toddy, arrack, and other spirits wafted from many of the revellers. It was sure a sight worth seeing.

Friends strongly advised me against venturing forth at all on Holi. But experience has taught me that an assumption that nothing untoward can happen to one is the best form of protection.

The tonga-wallah opened his mouth and nodded when I asked him to drive me through Chandni Chowk in Old Delhi. His nod, in Indian fashion, did not signify approval. "Holi, Holi, Holi," he exclaimed reprovingly.

"Yes, I know," I explained patiently. "I want to see Holi in the old bazaar."

"Not good for memsahib," he insisted, still nodding slowly.

"If you won't take me, I'll find another tonga," I replied firmly.

The prospect of losing, as a passenger, an exceptionally mad American woman was too much for his scruples. It is well known to all tonga-wallahs that all Americans are mad, and that their liberality is in direct ratio to the degree of their madness. With a half-hearted flourish of his whip towards the sanguinary stains over his own

garments, as a final concession to his conscience, he picked up the reins.

Chandni Chowk was the most fantastic scene I have witnessed for years. It boasts of a wide thoroughfare, as Indian bazaars go, but it was so jammed with swarming, shouting, singing pedestrians that the tonga made its way through at a snail's pace. And holiday or no holiday, the completely naked lunatics, the indefatigable snake-charmers, and the exhibitors of depressed monkeys and moth-eaten bears, prowled the streets as usual and were swallowed up by the surging hordes.

To my astonishment, a familiar voice spoke my name when we were in the thick of a chanting throng of parti-coloured madmen. At first I could not see anybody to whom the voice might have belonged. Indeed, if he had not reached an arm into the tonga and shaken me by the elbow, I would never have recognised him. It was a Brahman friend, of a wealthy and highly-cultured family. He had studied abroad and was normally to be encountered in the more exclusive haunts of New Delhi. Yet there he was, plastered with red from top to toe, capering with the rest, as far as a fantastic cargo of whisky would permit.

"Whash doin' down here, Dor'thy?" he called out. "Go home. Sh'no plashe for you t'day. Tonga-wallah, you take memsahib back, shee?"

Before I could reply he disappeared head-first into the mob, in response to violent tugs on his free arm by his companions.

"'Bye. Go home," came his voice faintly as his heels vanished from sight.

The Indian women were having their share of the fun too, even though they were not in the packed streets. I could see them among the brilliantly-dressed groups lining the flat roofs of the tall buildings, shrieking with laughter as they helped to pelt the milling mass below with rotten eggs, shoes, and various other missiles. How the revellers



kept up their dancing, singing, and playing of lutes, drums and other instruments, was beyond me. It was hot enough for me, sitting passively in the tonga, and taking no more violent exercise than to wag an admonitory finger, successfully, at the few youngsters who took aim at me with insect guns charged with the lurid fluids being freely splashed around.

Only for a moment was the holiday atmosphere of the occasion in danger during the time we drove through the multitudes. That was when a Hindu youth, either too drunk to care what he was doing or incapable of seeing straight, doused a Pathan with coloured water. For a few seconds the very air seemed to hang motionless and threatening as a poised sword. Perhaps the silence lasted a mere fraction of a second. It was hard to tell. One's own attention was too firmly fixed upon the crimson patches slowly spreading down the Pathan's clothing. I was near enough to see his face at close range. His nostrils flared like a stallion about to scream his challenge to the world ; his right hand dropped towards his waistline where a broad cummerbund provided ample cover for almost any instrument of death.

What might have happened, it was all too easy to surmise. If the Pathan had not been dragged away by his companion, had he struck or stabbed the young Hindu, the whole of Old Delhi would have been in a riotous uproar inside half an hour. The spectre of communal strife has been banished for the time being ; but it will be many years before all Indians will automatically live together in peace as they did in the closing years of the British Raj.

In the generous spaces of New Delhi, the holiday spirit appeared more diluted ; though bands of celebrants danced and sang as cheerfully there as in the roadway running down in the shadow of the historic Red Fort in Old Delhi. If the local newspapers are to be trusted, the apparent dilution was completely illusory. The " Delhi Diary " column of

one national weekly recorded a fascinating account of the gambollings at the Nehru abode :

Perhaps, the merriest Holi was celebrated at the Prime Minister's residence. About two hundred inmates and servants of the house, scores of farmers from the neighbouring villages, Lady Mountbatten and her daughter, Pandit Nehru's three nieces, Mrs. Krishna Hutheesingh and an assorted crowd of visitors participated in the festivities. Pandit Nehru himself was the chief contestant in the "colour war." He gave and received no quarter. In a few minutes his shirt and churidars bore all the rainbow hues in glorious disarray. At the end, when he, together with his guests, posed for a big group photograph, it was perhaps the most unusual scene of the decade.

Purely as a matter of personal preference, give me a snowball fight any day. But in spite of the looks of it, Holi is probably good, clean fun. At any rate, there is much to be said in its favour if it takes laughter and excitement into the poorer quarters and the lives of their inhabitants. They need it. But I cannot help feeling that the Indian Government will miss a great opportunity if it fails to launch a plan to make the throwing of full buckets of clean water obligatory, instead of silly little cupfuls of coloured water. If all the teeming thousands who pack each street of India's cities for Holi were to throw one full bucket of water apiece, it would ensure that at least once a year, apart from the monsoons, the roads would be flushed clear of the scum of cow and camel dung, fruit skins, excretions, human excreta, and other garbage which forms their normal surface.

Independence has brought a rich harvest to the bazaars up and down the country. There has been an enormous amount of trade in stolen and looted property since partition. Such goods have always found their way to the bazaars. In the past year or two the flow has been at a higher rate than usual, for obvious reasons. It has contributed to the

prosperity of them all, but particularly to that of one of the most notorious of the lot—the “Chor Bazaar,” or “Thieves Market” of Bombay.

Mary, a jolly Englishwoman, took me there recently to see it at its most flourishing. “This is the place to come if you’ve lost something you especially value,” she told me. “Most of the property stolen in any part of India finds its way sooner or later to Chor Bazaar.”

“But can’t the police do anything about it?” I asked.

“Not likely,” she laughed. “By the time an article appears in one of the stalls, it has passed through so many hands that it’s beyond the wit of man to trace its wanderings, and well-nigh impossible for the original owner to establish his claim to it.”

“What sort of stuff is sold here?” I inquired.

“Anything and everything,” was the reply. “There’s one section of the bazaar covering an entire side-street devoted to selling spare parts for cars. You could buy a part for almost any make of car you cared to name. The dealers here get their stock almost entirely from the smaller garages. If you leave a car at one of those concerns to have a minor fault corrected, you can stand by while the job is done and drive away well content. But when you get home and examine your car, you are likely to find that a few of the smaller but more valuable parts of the engine have been whipped out and replaced by badly-worn replacements doctored up to last for a few miles.”

“But couldn’t you go back to the garage and prove they had gyped you?”

“Not a hope,” Mary assured me emphatically. “By the time you discovered what had happened, the parts taken from you would have started on their journey to Chor Bazaar and part of the proceeds would be devoted to buying more junk ready for a repeat of the operation.”

We wandered through street after street. The profusion of weirdly-assorted goods was bewildering enough; but

there were two factors Mary had not prepared me for that struck me most forcibly. The first was the sight, in more than one street, of strings of Pakistan flags hanging above the roadways, flaunting defiantly in the heart of Indian territory. The other was the absence of beggars. During the entire tour we were not once accosted by the whine of "baksheesh" which is the usual obligato to every stroll in an Indian bazaar. In fact, we did not even see a single beggar.

It would seem that in India, if there is no honour among thieves, there is either an unusual degree of pride or an unprecedented measure of prosperity among the Muslims of Bombay.

## CHAPTER XI

### VILLAGE VAGARIES

BEHIND the panorama of change and drama in the cities of the New India lies that Old India which has not altered one iota. It includes nine-tenths of the total population. It is Village India.

Independence has made no difference to the people of the villages, which were estimated before partition at a total of 700,000 in what are now the two new Dominions of the British Commonwealth. On the basis of the population of India and Pakistan respectively, the Republic of India must have somewhere around 600,000 villages. They are her handicap and her strength. All the hopes and plans of her leaders depend in the last resort upon the peasants. They hold the key. It is on their skill and hard work in the fields that the rest of India lives. But the dominant feature of the peasant in India, as in all other countries, is that he is averse to change. He will make changes if someone can prove to him that he stands to gain; but he wants proof and not promises. Those who would bring about reforms in the villages must overcome a vast inertia.

Village inertia has been the curse and the blessing of India for centuries. It will remain so for generations to come. It has delayed, and will delay again, developments that would have been or would be beneficial to the entire country. But at the same time, it has provided the foundation upon which all the structures of the successive Indias have been erected. It has persisted, and prevented disintegration when more progressive sections of the Indian people were in a turmoil.

There are areas, as for example in the Hyderabad region, where village life has been shaken out of its normal pattern

by the events which followed independence ; but on the whole, this older India has pursued its own way of life unperturbed. Government is a remote and detestable institution always avid for taxes. Who runs it is a matter of little concern. How they run it matters not a fraction more, unless their methods result in higher taxes. The furious fighting between Hindu and Muslim in the Punjab and in the bazaars of the cities has not penetrated into more than a few of the millions in the villages. Most of them go on living in peace and friendliness with their neighbours, regardless of differences in religion.

Some of the smaller and more remote villages are still not truly aware of the stirring events of the past few years. They know that great changes have been made, but they are not at all sure of their nature. Still less are they sure that they approve.

One venerable old patriarch of a tiny village on the fringe of the jungle shook his head sadly when I had my Indian companion question him about his views on India's independence. "There is too much talk," he said. "It was better in the old days. Our own Panchayat settled our problems. If something was too big for the Panchayat, someone could be sent to the Commissioner Sahib. He was our father and mother. We knew where we stood. Now our young men hear talk when they go to market. They don't want to listen to their elders. The Panchayat hasn't met for many years. If it did meet, our young men would pay no heed. We don't know where we are, and that's not good. The Raj shouldn't have done such a thing to us."

How far back the patriarch was going by his reference to the old days, I could not make out from the interpretation of his remarks. But he was on a good thing when he bemoaned the decay of the Panchayat system. That was a form of government, and indeed of democracy, that India understood very well. She ought to have. She had been

using it unaltered for thousands of years ; and until roads and rails began to open up the country and bring the scattered communities together in larger units, she employed it with success. Throughout the centuries, the village was the unit of society—a unit self-contained and self-sufficient. It was governed by its Panchayat, or council of five. They may not have been elected in the modern sense of the term, but they commanded a respect which ensured that their rule was obeyed.

In the past half-century the new influences have undermined the old. The villagers have lost faith in the old social system and way of life. They have not yet fully understood or adopted the new ways. Only peasant stability has kept them hard at work, growing food for themselves and a small surplus for conversion into cash to satisfy the demands of the tax-collector, and the silversmith who makes the jewellery which forms the Indian's investment programme.

Of course, in India, the term "village" is wondrously elastic. It is applied to a collection of half a dozen huts of straw-matting set down in a forest clearing, or to places with a population which would make them towns, and sizable towns at that, in other countries. One feature that all villages have in common, except for a negligible number of "show-pieces," is a total absence of comfort or amenities of any kind. Not that it matters to the villagers. As my grandmother used to tell me, with infuriating logic, "What you've never had, you never miss." It was an argument in which I never believed. But, since I have studied India and her people in all their assorted surroundings, Grannie's words come back with a new force and significance ; for the villagers are incomparably the happiest peoples in the country, in spite of a meagre and monotonous diet, a life of constant drudgery, an unkind climate, persistent illnesses, and homes of unbelievable squalor.

Whether the village be large or small, the basic home is

the same. It is a one-room hut, with mud or cow-dung floor. It may boast of a charpoy or two ; in other words a rickety, wooden bed with cord laced netwise across the frame. That will be the beginning and end of furnishings. The kitchen is where the woman puts down her charcoal stove of the size and general appearance of a pedestal fruit bowl made of cast iron. The sitting-room, dining-room, bedroom, kitchen, nursery, and guest-room are all the same single compartment. The bathroom is the village pond or the nearest stream, and the lavatory the most convenient bush or else just the ground outside the hut.

Aged parents, married children, youngsters, and widowed or orphaned relatives are quite likely to be squeezed in too. But not all the overcrowding can be blamed on poverty. Part of it can be confidently ascribed to the Indians preferring to live on top of one another. They pack into cramped quarters even when there is ample space for the building of another hut ; and the method of construction is so light that the erection of a new hut would hardly take more than a day's work by the family. Cramming themselves together to an extent which might be expected to produce suffocation, is one of the things that the Indians do best. One has only to see how many can and do emerge from a country bus, or from a normal-sized saloon car, to realise that.

So, in conditions fit to bring tears to the eyes of Western sentimentalists, the peasants laugh and jest far more than the minority of their countrymen who have achieved a degree of material comfort which would appear to the villager as the wildest luxury. This is the Old India that is in many ways the reality behind the New.

One long, baking day in one of the larger villages at the height of a 1949 heat-wave proved that it has lost no whit of its advantages or disadvantages. Kutchbhiwani is big, but otherwise typical. It exists mainly on rice and cotton.



Jack, who has spent eleven years in India as a member of the staff of a large British firm, had been shelving for months an invitation from a moderately wealthy Indian of this village—an invitation to visit him. As Mr. Khan was an acquaintance of long standing, and as I wanted to see whether independence had wrought any changes in Kutchbhiwani, Jack decided to serve two purposes at once by inviting me to go with him.

He astonished me by saying that the village had a population of twenty-five thousand. When I objected that that made it a town rather than a village, he grinned broadly till his blue eyes were mere slits. "That's what you think," he teased. "You wait until you've had a good look at it. It's a village all right, and it's so thoroughly off the main road that Khan will have to meet us at the nearest point to make sure that we find it at all."

We drove there on a Sunday morning. As we sped along the main road past one straggle of mud-huts, jostling each other for a glimpse of the road, we noticed a very large and prominent sign, and slowed down to read what it had to say. Rather to my surprise, the notice was in English. That seemed a little pointless, as it was clearly not meant for road passengers; and it was a safe bet that there were not more than three people for miles around who could read English, even if there might have been a few who could understand and speak a little. The bold lettering upon the board read, "This well water is for use by all castes and creeds. India awakes!"

Perhaps, after all, the sign-writer, or the man who had it placed there, knew what he was about. As long as the notice was in English, he was safe. It would only have been awkward if it had been in a language and script that the local people could understand. Then they would have beaten him up, or else have ridiculed him so unmercifully that he would have had to flee the district.

Where drinking water is concerned, the railways are

much more realistic. Stand-pipes on the station platforms carry their little notices in several of the Indian scripts, and sometimes in English as well, "For Hindus Only." The railway officials have not had these notices taken down because resolutions have been passed in the Central Legislative Assembly asserting that in the new secular state of India, no man or woman must be penalised by reason of caste or creed. They have left the signs as a service to the travelling public. They do not want Hindu passengers dying of thirst in the trains or on the platforms. It would give the line a bad name if it happened too often. It could happen, too. It would not be the first time that a caste Hindu had quietly let go of life rather than drink from a source tainted by those of another religion, or by untouchables ; or for that matter, that an untouchable had done the same rather than break the rigid code and drink from a well reserved for his betters.

The walls of the caste system have been breached ; but the relieving forces have not yet figured out any way of helping prisoners who just squat down on their haunches and gaze reflectively at the gap in the wall. It is a perfectly good and genuine gap. But as far as large numbers of those contained within the walls are concerned, it might not be there at all.

In the cities the rigidity of the social structure is breaking down fast ; but in most country districts it remains the same as in past years, allowing for the gradual change that has been taking place throughout the present century. I guess the enthusiast who posted that notice on a village well was expecting a good flow of foreign visitors along his stretch of the highway.

Mr. Khan was waiting for us, in that typically Indian pose of squatting on the heels with both feet planted flat on the ground. There are Europeans who can achieve this position, but they are few, and are normally those who are so painfully thin that they have no leg muscles to get in

the way when they fold themselves up like jack-knives. Our host for the day was not thin. He was a solidly-built man of medium height who looked about forty, though he may have been older as his hair was thinning—and that is a misfortune that most Indians avoid for longer than men do in the West. As a leading man in the community, and as befitted a man respected by his fellows, he was well used to sitting upon chairs. Yet he retained the suppleness which left him completely free from strain after waiting in that squatting posture for a long time until our arrival.

For the thousandth time, as Mr. Khan beamed an enthusiastic welcome, the perfection of the teeth of so many of the Indians struck me afresh. Whether it is a matter of diet, or special methods of care for them, I do not know; but it is very noticeable, especially in country districts, that the inhabitants either have teeth reddened and rendered completely hideous by the chewing of betel-nut wrapped up in a pan leaf smeared with chunam paste, or keep teeth of sparkling brilliance to a ripe old age. Both theories have been advanced to me by Indians. The first was put forward by a strict Hindu. He was exactly like our own brand of vegetarians. He ascribed every ill that flesh is heir to, to the eating of meat, and assured me most solemnly that it was a meat diet which was responsible for all tooth trouble. Even allowing for my natural desire not to see the force of his argument, since I am a confirmed member of the carnivorous group, his suggestion did not seem really feasible. It has never, so far as I can find, been proven that tigers suffer acutely from toothaches. Nor does the idea of meat causing all diseases ring in one's ears with any great degree of conviction in India where about the only people who do not suffer from a handsome selection of infections, are the foreigners who have been born and bred on a diet including more meat in a week than most non-vegetarian Indians consume in a quarter.

Our host climbed into the back of Jack's open car, and

we set off down the road to Kutchbhiwani. "Road" is really a courtesy title. There is no road. There is a track which might in time, with a lot of hard work, form the basis for a road. But even that was a great deal better than the space between the buildings when we arrived at Kutchbhiwani itself. There was room for the car to pass, with care. It was just as well that Jack drives a small British automobile. A big American tourer would have needed greasing to get it through.

Mr. Khan called a halt outside a very large wall-cupboard with its floor several feet above ground level into which had been installed two small tables, three chairs and a few items of office furniture tucked into the corners. Shelves fixed to the wooden walls held samples of the wares which formed the firm's stock-in-trade, and rendered movement perilous.

Our host waved his arms in a generous gesture, or as generous as space would permit, and bade us welcome to his combined office and shop.

There was a nasty jolt waiting for Jack. Being Sunday, he had calculated on paying a purely social visit. But he had been thinking in terms of the cities where the habits introduced by the British still hold sway. He had forgotten that in the country and the villages, Sunday is just another day. That is fair enough. Where the population is mixed Hindu and Muslim, as in Kutchbhiwani, everyone observes both Hindu and Muslim holidays. The same applies in the cities, of course, but the country-folk seem to have a better supply of religious celebrations other than Christian.

Mr. Khan promptly got down to an earnest discussion on business. Several of his employees, friends or business associates, I could not tell which, materialised inside the wall-cupboard. Room for them there was none; but by perching on the extreme edge of the open front, or hotching half under the tables, they managed to join in the conference.

As it could not be hotter or more congested outside than in the office-shop, I proposed that I should go for a stroll

round the village while they talked business. Mr. Khan was distressed by this suggestion and loudly bewailed his rudeness in launching into shop-talk. But he was swiftly consoled when I assured him that prowling round was precisely what I most wished to do. He detailed an untidy urchin, whom I later learned was of the Vaisya caste, to act as escort, and settled down again joyously to make the most of Jack's first visit to his premises.

I still do not know where the population of twenty-five thousand is disposed in Kutchbhiwani. The entire area it covers, is certainly not larger than that of a fair-sized American or British township. As Jack had prophesied, it is, despite the size of its population, entirely on village lines. There is no drainage, no electric light or gas, and no privacy except for a few better-class houses and the upper floors of the minority of two-storied premises. They are the women's quarters of Muslim households. As for the rest, the single-room homes are simply partially-screened extensions of the streets whose surface consists of a judicious mixture of rubbish, dust, pot-holes inches deep, and projecting rocks.

The passer-by does not pry into the lives of the families living crammed together in the noisome alleyways. He or she is part of their life, and becomes a party to it by the mere act of passing. In nine rooms out of ten, goats, chickens, and cooking pots form the sole furnishings. Nothing more is needed. The occupants squat on the mud or stone floors and therefore have no need for chairs. They sleep on the floor, except for the occasional sybarite who indulges in a charpoy. They wear their wardrobe, and so need no chests-of-drawers or other storage accommodation. In each room a family, frequently of several generations, manages to pack itself.

Here was a cross-section of the real India, the India which goes its way untouched by the excitements of independence and democracy. Here was the simple explanation of the terrible incidence of diseases. Here were the

reasons and excuses for the incest and perversion rampant in the country. How could it be otherwise? In one room a man and woman wrestled amorously while several children, products no doubt of earlier adventures, stood around watching, and another little girl relieved herself unashamedly on the doorstep in front of us. Is it surprising that children raised in such conditions should find in their own and each other's bodies the readiest form of amusement?

On one street was the village oil-mill grinding out oil for cooking in the fashion of centuries ago. The earthen floor was so thick in mud and slime that it oozed inside my shoes. Round the walls, in the half-dark, men of the village were hunched together, puffing on their pungent bidis and chattering steadily while a blindfolded bull buffalo trudged in a circle, dragging the massive beam of the primitive mill. The only active man in the shed was the mill-owner; he crouched in the centre of the circle trodden by his buffalo and fed the oil seeds into the grinding contraption.

That is not entirely true. Several of the congregation were active in paying their respects to Lakshmi, the Goddess of Wealth, by playing some of the innumerable and inscrutable gambling games with which India is so richly endowed. Games of chance absorb the spare time and the spare cash of the majority. What money may be hoarded by the few is habitually buried under the mud floors, or in the compounds of more opulent homes. Which explains why one very rarely sees a bank in any Indian village.

Several more buffaloes were tethered in the shade at the back of the shed. A highly-sophisticated villager—he could speak at least fifty words of English—seized upon the heaven-sent opportunity to impress his colleagues, and treated me to a dissertation on the operation of the mill. He impressed his companions a great deal more than he enlightened me; though I did gather that the buffaloes were used in two-hour shifts and each worked six hours per day. At the rate of oil extraction while I was watching, those beasts would

be needed for grinding seeds twenty-four hours non-stop to meet the needs of Kutchbhiwani. An occasional dribble of oil oozed into the bucket at the foot of the wooden base, but it must have taken the better part of the day to squeeze out enough oil to fill the container.

Village life moved as it has always done, at a leisurely and unhurried pace. This was a place of peasants moving with the deliberation of the peasant. That is worth something when the temperature is well over the hundred mark, as it was the day of my visit. The only person to be seen hurrying was a shrunken stick of a man with a load that a buck labourer at home would have looked at with horror. But the Indian balanced it on his head and scurried barefooted through the dusty byways. His haste looked as though it might be related to the speed of a cyclist, in that neither could stop without falling.

Mr. Khan was entertaining Jack and myself to lunch, so the morning's tour could not be protracted. On my return to the office-shop, we set off, all three, in our car, with Mr. Khan revelling in the sensation that he and his European friends were creating, and shouting instructions on the route to follow through the maze of passages.

The Khan residence was a three-floor building sitting a fraction farther back from the road than its neighbours. A few stone steps led to the ground floor. It consisted of a single large room with a charpoy as the only item of furniture. The charpoy was occupied by a grey-bearded man sleeping noisily. "My father," giggled Mr. Khan self-consciously as he led the way rapidly up a flight of narrow, carpetless, stone steps and into a room whose fairly generous size was disguised by the presence of an enormous bed, a square table, and six straight-back chairs. It was clean and tidy except for some broken dishes in one corner, but devoid of comfort. The only effort at decoration was in the hanging of several blue vases from the ceiling, and the pinning to the walls of some parchments with inscriptions

in Arabic. There were, of course, family photographs, but they hardly came under the heading of decoration. The victims were perched unhappily on unfamiliar chairs, or posed woodenly against backcloths of incredible dullness and artificiality.

The youngest of Mr. Khan's brothers and an attractive woman in her late thirties were presented to us. The woman, dressed in a cotton sari and heavy gold bracelets, was introduced as Mrs. Mehta. That was a little puzzling, as she had the air of the hostess; but the mystery was solved when Mr. Khan went on to complete the introduction by explaining that she was his partner in business.

In the interval of awkwardness which followed the introductions, I asked if I might wash my hands before lunch. Mr. Khan apologised profusely for not having thought of it himself, and the brother hurried out of the room to return in a matter of seconds with a bowl, towel, soap, and a brass teapot. There was something almost Biblical about the ceremony of the pouring of water on to my hands while I held them above the bowl. It was more picturesque than satisfactory as a means of removing the grime and dust of the streets.

The younger brother did not join us at the table. He acted as waiter and laid before us a most excellent curry. Although rice is rationed, Mr. Khan produced a feast. He was so insistent in his hospitality that I, for one, grossly over-ate, with the result that I belched heartily when the meal was over—it is the only polite way in India of showing that one has thoroughly enjoyed one's food.

Mrs. Mehta, on the other hand, did not eat anything. "Have you had lunch already, Mrs. Mehta?" I inquired.

"Yes," she replied gravely. "I had tiffin before I left home to-day. I can't eat in this house. You see, I'm a Hindu and it wouldn't be proper for me to eat food prepared by a Muslim."

I glanced hastily at Jack to see whether I had inadvertently



dropped a brick. But it was apparent from his unperturbed attack upon the mountain of curry and rice before him, and from the matter-of-fact tones of Mrs. Mehta herself, that the situation was taken very much as an accepted state of affairs. Mr. Khan was a Muslim. She was a Hindu. They did not eat the same food. And that was that.

But what a fascinating story lay behind the calmly-accepted difference of creed, and what a startling illustration of how village life can avoid the bitterness which has been endemic in the cities between the two communities. It emerged in conversation during the course of the meal.

Mrs. Mehta was the widow of Mr. Khan's former partner who, though a Hindu, had worked in perfect harmony with Mr. Khan for twenty years and had been his best friend. When Mr. Mehta had died a few years back, he had left no son to inherit his share of the business; so Mr. Khan took the widow into partnership to provide for her and for her daughters. It had obviously been camouflaged charity in the first instance, for Mrs. Mehta said that she had had no experience in business of any kind before she entered into this partnership. Now it was a genuine and efficient alliance. Mrs. Mehta looked after the office-shop and dealt with customers while Mr. Khan called on the big buyers and travelled to the city to see suppliers.

She was no ordinary village woman. For one thing, she had had a good education, including English lessons, and even in her teens had started to take a lively interest in politics and public affairs. In fact, she took so lively an interest in politics in the early 'thirties that she was one of the followers of Gandhi who courted arrest and was imprisoned for six months. That seemed to be the episode in her life which gave her the keenest satisfaction—that and the progress she had made in the partnership which was enabling her to send her daughters to a private school in Poona to be trained to play an active part in the building of the country.

"Are there many women in Kutchbhiwani who share your enthusiasm and eagerness for public service?" I asked.

Mrs. Mehta hesitated unhappily, and then, staring at her bare toes, answered sadly, "One or two." But her depression did not last. She raised her head and assured me with a beaming smile, "When my girls grow up it will be different, I promise you. Their generation will realise what has been done, and what has still to be done." It did not seem kind to press the subject, or to remind her that there would probably not be half-a-dozen families in the village who either could or would send their daughters away to be educated.

When lunch was over, Mr. Khan disappeared into a room behind that in which we had been entertained, and came out again leading by the hand a plump, grey-haired lady who looked acutely embarrassed at being exhibited to strangers. He introduced her as his wife. Mrs. Mehta explained in an aside that he was most progressive for a Muslim and had done his best to induce his wife to appear in public with him; but that the most he had been able to persuade her to do was to appear unveiled before guests in her own house.

Mr. Khan vanished again into the inner room from which came a chorus of feminine squeals and giggles before he ushered in to meet us his daughters and an assortment of nieces and cousins. Altogether I counted eleven girls and women apart from Mrs. Mehta and myself; and even while I marvelled, Mr. Khan began to apologise for not being able to present to us the rest of his family. It appeared that two of his elder married brothers and their families lived in that same house, as well as the youngest brother who had acted as waiter, and the latter's bride of a month. His own sons were at school and would not be returning until later in the afternoon.

Jack swears that my mouth opened an eighth of an inch

with each new rabbit that conjurer Khan whipped out of the back room. That strikes me as a physical impossibility ; but perhaps something of my astonishment did show in my face for our host asked me if I would care to see the rest of the house. Jack was not included in the invitation. Mr. Khan might be so progressive that he deliberately introduced his womenfolk to a strange man, but he was not yet such an abandoned wretch as to permit a stray male to invade the women's quarters. Not that the visitor would have seen anything to raise his blood pressure. The small back room proved to be a combined bedroom and kitchen. Beside the crude concrete firebox, with holes in it for the charcoal, was a stone box for holding water. That, as far as I could see, was the sum of the provisions for cooking, washing-up, and toilet purposes for however many of the swarm slept there.

More carpetless stairs, this time of wood, led to the top floor. Mrs. Mehta acted as guide, to show me the bedroom occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Khan, while the proud proprietor stayed below. It was an instance of unexpected delicacy and tact ; for a small chamber projecting from the side of the building from one wall of the marital bedroom proved to be the entire sanitary equipment of the house. It was of the utmost simplicity. There was a hole in the middle of the concrete floor, with a sheer drop to ground level. Fortunately that side of the house appeared to be unfrequented, though what was done about the problem of disposal from ground level I did not like to ask. For all I know, it was not even regarded as a problem.

Mrs. Mehta drew my attention to the view to be had from the eminence of the third floor.

"Isn't that a beautiful view ?" she advanced.

"It must be rather exceptional to be able to see so far," I replied hastily, feeling rather proud of evading an awkward question with so little warning.

"Yes, indeed," said Mrs. Mehta, with great emphasis.

"Even the largest houses seldom have a view of anything but their own compound."

I could not repress the thought that one's own compound, provided it received a reasonable amount of care and attention, would be a rather pleasanter outlook than the view Mrs. Mehta had called upon me to admire. In the foreground there was a riot of weeds, in the middle distance some untidy roofs, and beyond that a sluggish, yellowy-grey stream where she-buffaloes washed themselves and village women washed the family's clothes.

When we returned to the dining-sitting-bedroom from our tour of inspection, it was to find that Mr. Khan was waiting to garland Jack and myself. It was typical that he should hang round our necks wreaths of strongly-scented, fresh flowers, since garlanding is essentially the most common Indian custom for honouring guests.

Jack had been garlanded so often before that he wore his chain of flowers with as little concern as the sacred bulls which stroll the streets of village and city alike, similarly bedecked. It was easy for him, as he and Mr. Khan had settled down to a further session of general discussion. But I planned to go out to see other aspects of social affairs with Mrs. Mehta who as President of the Women's Council of that district was more than interested in showing me what Kutchbhiwani was doing. The idea of wandering round for the rest of the afternoon hung about with flowers did not exactly appeal to me. On the other hand, it was impossible to hurt the feelings of anyone who had been so thoughtful and kind as Mr. Khan.

"Say, can I park this wreath without upsetting him?" I whispered to Jack, as our host vanished for a moment into the back room.

"Tell him you want to be sure of taking it home intact, and ask if you may leave it here in safe keeping while you're tramping round the maternity hospital, and schools, and wherever else you're going," he suggested.

It worked like a charm. Mr. Khan was visibly gratified at my solicitude for the garland, and agreed with alacrity that it would be fresher for the drive home if left in the house.

The existence of a charitable maternity home in Kutchbhiwani marked it out as an exceptionally progressive village. Very few of the smaller ones have as much as a visiting midwife to assist women in the bearing of their children. Peasants often just drop babies in the fields, or wherever they happen to be at that moment, and carry on with their work with little interruption. Even larger places like Kutchbhiwani do not always have the luxury of a maternity hospital for poor mothers. Mrs. Mehta explained that the venture was made possible because the native doctors gave their services free.

For a community of twenty-five thousand, to say nothing of countless numbers in hamlets scattered over the surrounding countryside, the accommodation was fantastically inadequate. There were four charpoys on the ground floor and two more on the first floor. That could not have gone far to meet the needs of the women of the area, particularly in view of their violent aversion to birth-control. The hospital boasted no sheets and the stone floor could with advantage have been cleaner ; but the nurse in charge had that warmth of heart and enthusiasm for her work which more than compensated for minor defects. When we arrived she was holding against her apron, in the palm of one hand, a tiny pink morsel who mewed like a kitten still at the sightless stage, and was giving it a drink from an eye-dropper.

"Good heavens," I gasped at first glance. "Haven't you got that kid in an incubator ?"

"What for ?" Mrs. Mehta demanded calmly.

"It's so tiny," I exclaimed. "It can't be safe to keep it out like that. In America the hospitals have special arrangements for premature babies."

Mrs. Mehta and the nurse both smiled broadly. "But this isn't a premature baby. He is a perfectly normal and healthy full-term child. We are only too happy that this one doesn't have rickets."

"But what does he weigh?" I asked, still amazed at the size of the minute bundle.

"Three and a half pounds," was the airy response. "He's doing well and has regained birth weight already, after only seven days."

That was something I had not discovered during my previous stay in India. It is nothing unusual for Indian women, especially in the villages, to bear children of three pounds or even less; and they are perfectly formed and in no way premature. Why it should be so is not absolutely certain. It is probably a combination of inadequate diet and of the women continuing to slave laboriously until the last possible second before childbirth. Or perhaps it is a merciful dispensation of Krishna, since most of the mothers have their first child between the ages of fifteen and eighteen, and a good many give birth still younger.

The schools in Kutchbhiwani are still carrying on exactly as they have done for generations. In the single classroom of one primary school for Muslims, little boys sat behind one another astride the narrow bench which ran right round the room, their black caps nodding and swaying in unison as they chanted their lessons after their master.

Where there is a fantastic contrast between the ways of city and village is in the weaving industry. About a quarter of the cloth India makes for her own use is produced on hand-loom and many of the two and a half million such looms in use are scattered throughout villages up and down the country. Some of the larger places have a share of the small power-loom introduced into the industry in the last eight or nine years. But the cotton weaving of the villages is mainly hand-loom work. It is the most important industry in the country from the point of view of the numbers it

employs. About ten million workers earn their livelihood through it ; and although the new India will presumably wish to end such an inefficient system in favour of higher production per man-hour, that is a matter which will have to be approached with the greatest caution. Industrial revolution is seldom an easy matter. It could be fraught with many grave dangers in villages where machines would be regarded as a menace by a high proportion of the population.

Kutchbhiwani's hand-loom factories are primitive to the nth degree. Unrelated pieces of wood dangle from thongs of leather. Much-knotted bits of string play a conspicuous part. Operators contort themselves into surrealist positions as they use both hands and both feet simultaneously to work their cumbersome equipment. Men and boys engaged in dyeing lengths of newly-woven cloth wander lackadaisically among the machines with armfuls of dripping fabric, and wash the surplus colour out by sousing the cloth in primitive wells as their forefathers did in the days of Asoka.

Village factories and workshops have no crèches such as are provided by the modern establishments of some Indian towns and cities. Babies crawl round the busy feet of their mothers, and older children either help with simpler tasks or play involved games of their own devising. In one corner of a small workshop in Kutchbhiwani, several solemn youngsters were practising the movements of the Indian classical dances which, if done well, are the delight of all who watch them closely.

The villages remain strongholds of folk-dancing. It is an art embodying the epitome of grace. It comes easily to boys and girls who from early youth carry loads of all shapes poised upon their heads, and who have retained the full elasticity of their feet through constantly going barefoot. Even in wealthier homes the inherent grace of carriage persists ; and though children from them may sometimes

wear shoes in public, they, too, enjoy the freedom of unrestrained toes during all the hours when they are within the domestic walls. In fact, it is not at all unusual to see children and adults walking along the streets carrying their sandals on their heads.

Whatever happens in the cities, the villages of India will change at their own pace, or change not at all.



## CHAPTER XII

### INFLUENTIAL CIRCLE

TO-DAY, as never before, the Central Legislative Assembly in New Delhi is the hub and the heart of India. Its old nickname of the "Monkey-House" lingers on, but the institution and its members are taken vastly more seriously than used to be the case.

As far as I can make out, the legislature building received its irreverent nickname purely on the basis of its somewhat strange appearance. There is no doubt that the complete circle of columns, which is the main feature of the design, contrasts sharply with the rest of the accommodations, whether permanent or temporary, in the area round the administrative blocks and the official residence of former Viceroy, now the official abode of Governor-General Rajagopalachari. I like it. But it must be admitted that few people seem to share my view. "Monkey-House" was merely the most popular of the names coined for the building in the past, though nearly all of them had some zoological connotation. "The Parrots' Cage" was another. By association, the scorn attached to the architecture transferred itself to some degree to the Assembly which met there.

With memories of the maligned Assembly of pre-independence days still in mind, I made efforts to attend a debate of the present Central Legislative Assembly during my 1949 visit to Delhi. But for the assistance of an Indian businessman with whom I had had some dealings during the war years and who now moves on the fringe of that most influential circle in all India—the Legislative Assembly—it is highly unlikely that my desire would have been gratified. Listening to the Parliament Members in full spate has

apparently become one of the more popular indoor sports of the capital. Demand for seats in the restricted galleries is so high that it is difficult for a foreigner to secure a pass.

Finding one's way into the Assembly building in the first place, and into the appropriate gallery in the second, is apt to leave one feeling that the popular nickname is perhaps not so inapposite after all. That place has far more entrances than any self-respecting legislature should have. Up the long flight of stairs, the position becomes more and more confusing. It is more like a squirrel's cage than a monkey-house; for the corridor runs completely round the building, and there is no way of knowing which way to go. At least there would be no way of knowing for a visitor paying a first call upon the legislators at work. On subsequent visits he might be all right, provided he had a good head for heights and a highly-developed bump of locality.

I was lucky. My business friend had far-sightedly sent along his senior assistant, Dadar, to see that I did not lose myself, and also to act as interpreter should any of the speakers embark upon languages unknown.

The galleries are really all part of one balcony running right around the circular assembly chamber. It is divided up by hand-rails. Directly above the Speaker's Chair is the Press Gallery. The Speaker's Gallery, for which Dadar and I held passes, lies on the Speaker's left. Facing him is the largest of the sections, known simply as the Visitors' Gallery. Half-right of the Speaker lies the Distinguished Visitors' Gallery. And on his right, the so-called Women's Gallery, for relatives of members. Each section has a separate entrance from the squirrels' race-track, and at each doorway, and at intervals between them, hang large notices giving warning that sticks, umbrellas, handbags, brief-cases and such items are all forbidden and must be left outside the galleries.

Our passes were checked on entry into the building.

They were checked again half-way up the stairs. At the top of the steps, three police officers scrutinised the passes once more and made entries on a special list.

"And that's that," I commented hopefully, as the inscriptions on the list were completed.

"Oah, not yet," my companion replied with a grin. "Usher comes now."

It was just as well that I had Dadar along to steer me through in safety. Had I been alone, the worst might have happened. I should certainly never have guessed at the identity of the individual who shlip-shlopped towards us in the backless sandals, or chappals, which most Indians keep on their feet by will power and shuffling. As he looked like a rather seedy salesman, I should probably, on my own, have adopted towards him the technique evolved to deal with the importunities of the all-pervasive bazaar-wallahs. What would have happened if I had waved a nonchalant "*Nai munta*" at the usher and swept on regardless, I hate to think.

Something ought to be done about rigging the ushers out in uniforms. It is not good enough to have an amiable gentleman in grey flannels completely innocent of anything resembling a crease, and wearing an open-necked shirt with a wealth of creases in the wrong places. It might not be so bad if all the garments were clean and fresh, but if that usher had not slept in his clothes, with his dingy turban as a pillow, his looks did him a grave injustice.

On second thought, it may be that the turban was intended to act as uniform. It was, or had been when clean, the same colour as the band of pink interwoven in the khaki turbans of the police on duty at the Assembly.

The pink ribbon in the police turbans was too much for me. "Do you think the choice of colour has any political significance?" I had asked Dadar as soon as it attracted my attention at the entrance.

He looked blank for a moment and then grinned widely. "If the band was chosen to match Congress policy, it would have to be much broader."

"Why?"

"That one is far too narrow to hold all the colours of the rainbow," he rejoined crisply.

The usher did not insist upon seeing our passes. But he did superintend the observance of the warning notices hung around the corridor, and insisted on my leaving, on a table outside the door to the Speaker's Gallery, a handbag which could not well have held any offensive weapon more serious than a very small, rotten egg. However, it was an order. That was enough. But neither he nor another paid the slightest attention to what might have been hidden in my companion's pockets, or for that matter, stowed about my person. If someone planned the liquidation of a Minister, or some similar activity, from one of the galleries, he would be crazy not to pay more than one visit to prospect the ground; so that when the time came to act, he would know all about the ban on brief-cases; and wherever his gun might be, it would assuredly not be in a brief-case. Also, there would be nothing to prevent him from hiding a small bomb underneath his jacket.

"Why ban sticks and umbrellas?" I asked Dadar. "They could hardly be used effectively as means of assault against any members sitting on the floor of the House."

"True, quite true," he assented, "but if tempers rose very high over the debate advanced below, gallery visitors might fall out with one another."

"But surely, if things got that bad, the opposing factions would do each other as much harm and cause as much of an uproar whether armed with umbrellas and walking sticks or not?"

"That depends," Dadar replied grimly, "upon the definition of a walking stick. A Jat frequently uses his lathi as a staff or walking stick. If you admit one type of

stick, you must admit another. So you might have several iron-tipped lathis in the galleries, fully equal to the task of cracking heads upstairs, and not too pleasant for members if they were to be hurled down from this height."

The most outstanding impression of the crowded House in attendance that day was of its drabness in comparison with the Assembly of pre-independence days. Then each member took pride in wearing his local variant of the different national costumes; scions of the Princely States flashed with bright silks and jewelled head-dresses; and the British, the indomitable British, braved the heat in morning coat and striped trousers.

All that has vanished. Garments of khaddi, or grey homespun, are common as visual evidence of the unsullied nationalism of the wearers. Many are in European dress. That day, the only flecks of colour were the saris of Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Minister of Health, and two other women members, and the glowing red uniforms, laced with gold, of the chaprasis, or overgrown errand boys. Even the residual glory of the chaprasis may soon disappear. There is talk of dismissing them altogether; and their uniform is already under sentence of abolition.

Proceedings opened with question-time, after the English fashion. The Speaker watched supplementaries with a critical eye and was quick to check irrelevancies, and call for the next question. None the less, the curiosity of several members had to go unsatisfied, as their queries were not reached by the time the hour allotted to the answering of questions was up. That was a pity. I should liked to have heard Sardar Patel, in his capacity of Minister of Home Affairs, replying to the last question on the list. It read, on the order paper of the day:

(a) whether it is a fact that a refugee girl of the age of 6 or 7 years was injured by a car driven by one Shri Kumar of the Pusa College on the Punchkuin Road on the evening of the 16th February 1949;

(b) whether it is a fact that the Station House Officer, Reading Road Police Station, New Delhi, had the girl admitted in the Lady Hardinge Hospital instead of in the Irwin Hospital ;

(c) whether it is a fact that the girl died in the Hospital on the 17th February 1949 ;

(d) whether it is a fact that no post mortem was performed on the dead body and the body was cremated ;

(e) whether it is a fact that the Police failed to register the case ; and

(f) whether the Station House Officer is in any way related to the said Shri Kumar ?

Ordinary members and Ministers alike made remarkably poor use of the excellent facilities provided. Each of the individual desks set in concentric arcs facing the Speaker's Chair was equipped with a microphone. Yet throughout the entire session only Rajkumari Amrit Kaur employed it properly. She made a point of putting her mouth close to the microphone, so that her well-spoken and confident tones could be clearly heard all over the chamber. The rest talked past it, to the surface of the desks, anywhere but into it. It was amazing to see from the next day's newspapers how much of what they had had to say, had been caught by the reporters sitting only a short distance away from me.

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, opening the debate on grants for the Home Ministry, was the worst offender of all. Exempted on grounds of age and infirmity from the normal practice of rising to address the Chair, he remained seated during the whole morning and kept his head down over the papers on his desk while he talked.

His review of the internal position was enlivened, for me, by the arrival in the Speaker's Gallery of another visitor who sat down beside me on the wooden bench. He was a high Indian official with a professional interest in the debate, and fortunately, he disregarded the prohibition against conversation among visitors. He kept up a running commentary which was extremely enlightening, since it

represented the reactions of a man better informed than most to the version of events and tendencies advanced by India's Deputy-Premier and "strong-man."

It surprised me to find that all questions, both printed and verbal, were asked in English. I remarked upon the fact in a whisper to Dadar. The distinguished stranger, who had just asked whether he might follow proceedings from my programme, since the limited number had already been handed out before his arrival, explained the matter to me.

When a member is elected to the Central Legislative Assembly, he has to stipulate before attending his first meeting which language he intends to use on the floor. Thereafter he must confine himself to that language whenever addressing the Speaker or fellow-members during the official sessions of the House. In the present Assembly, virtually all the members have undertaken to use English, since it is the one language in which they can be reasonably sure of making themselves understood by other members, although not by all visitors.

It was noticeable that interruptions of Patel's replies to questions angered the old man. Any suggestion of criticism or argument from members of the Assembly brought a note of asperity into his voice. It was equally noticeable that the sharpening of his tone pulled the questioners up short.

"The Sardar seems to have the Assembly well in hand," I whispered.

"He is the sheep-dog. They are the sheep," the newcomer affirmed, hitching up the trouser-legs of his smartly-tailored, grey suit. "He has only to bark and they scurry together in frightened silence. They may grumble behind his back, but they know he has the Congress Party in his pocket and they're afraid to challenge him in public in case he has them ejected from the Party."

Patel's speech might have been an echo from the past.

He voiced precisely those arguments in support of the actions of his Ministry as had so often been put forward by spokesmen of the British Raj. The only difference was that he condemned members of the R.S.S. and the Sikh Akali Dal, or Sikh Extremists, for "resorting to unlawful and violent means" and "putting faith in futile and harmful activities."

Grey Suit nodded approval to most of the Home Minister's remarks ; but when the old warrior defended the detention of prisoners without trial by growling that after all only a very small percentage of India's millions were affected by such measures, I thought my new friend would get himself ejected from the building.

"Is this the freedom we've longed for?" exploded Grey Suit. "No man should be imprisoned without trial. That's one of the cardinal features of democracy. How can he have the effrontery to sit there and prate of our progress as long as a single citizen is denied the elementary right of being proved guilty in open court before he is punished? We don't even have the excuse of being at war. This system in time of peace is monstrous. It's worse than the feudalism of our states. Their people would have every right now to complain that they've been freed from one tyranny only to come under another more efficient than its predecessor."

In the middle of his tirade, when his whispered soliloquy had risen above a whisper, the usher crept into the gallery. But he had not come to summon Grey Suit to leave. He moved instead towards an Englishman who was leaning forward with both forearms resting upon the rails of the front row, intent upon the scene below.

After a few words, the Englishman, looking mildly astonished, sat back on the bench and the usher slipped quietly out of the gallery again.

"What was wrong?" I asked Dadar.

"Oh, I s'pose he was telling the Englishman that it's



disrespectful to the Assembly to lean on the rail, and that he must sit up straight," chuckled Dadar.

That explained the visitor's look of surprise. His attitude had been one of concentrated interest, and might have been taken as a compliment to the speaker below. To Western eyes it was certainly not as disrespectful as the poses of some of the visitors. Several of them were squatting on the benches, buttocks on heels, and chins on knees, in the habitual posture of the masses. They were villagers who had been given passes to the Assembly so that they could observe democracy in practice and apply the lessons in the conduct of local affairs. It must have been a sore penance for most of them. They may have understood some English, but there was not one face among those of the obvious peasants which showed any sign of comprehension. If the members had recited nursery rhymes, it would have meant just as much to the worthies specially invited to the session for indoctrination.

Dadar also came under the usher's displeasure in the course of the morning. He had crossed his legs and had just clasped his hands round the raised knee when he was tapped firmly on the shoulder and told to put his feet together on the floor.

"Now what?" I demanded of my companion.

Dadar looked thoroughly shamefaced. "The sole of my shoe was turned towards the Speaker."

It seemed inadequate grounds for reproof. After all, it was a leather sole, presumably "sacred" cow-hide, so turning it towards the Speaker ought surely to have been regarded as an act of homage.

Those two incidents confirmed what friends had told me on several occasions. New India has washed the colour out of the deliberations of the Assembly, but she has not reduced the ceremony attached to it. If anything, the rules and regulations have been tightened and formality increased. It was noticeable that all members of the legislature, though

they wandered in and out during the course of the debate, invariably complied with the rule that they must bow to the Speaker's Chair on entering and on leaving, whether it be occupied or not.

Sardar Patel wound up his review of the government's moves against disorders with a rousing claim, "I can make bold to say that so far as internal peace and tranquillity are concerned, the country is not faced with any serious threats."

Members on the floor of the chamber loudly thumped their desks and cried, "Hear, Hear." Many of the spectators in the galleries looked as though they would willingly have followed the example of their rulers, if they had not been forbidden to make any sound of approval or disapproval. Grey Suit groaned, "The blind leading the blind. Everybody in touch with administration knows quite well that Communism is spreading furiously. Every cheap bookstall is crammed with paper-backs on Marxism, and the Moscow-trained organisers are working like beavers to develop cells. They have riddled the trade unions already."

"It does seem odd," I assented, "that he should say that there's no serious internal threat, and at the same time should insist so strongly on the retention and use of the emergency powers of detention."

"That's my point, precisely," Grey Suit went on eagerly. "If there's no emergency, there can be no excuse for retaining emergency methods. Even if there is an emergency, the Assembly should be able to define what types of action are illegal and specify them in proper form so that those who constitute a menace to the safety of the country can be arrested and tried in a proper manner."

"You would approve of some action against Communism, then ?

"Of course," he emphasised. "In my view it's ridiculous that men should be allowed to preach Communism in a democratic state."

"Do you suggest that the Assembly should pass a bill outlawing the Communist Party?"

"Oh no," Grey Suit retorted quickly. "That would be foolish and short-sighted. What I'd like to see, would be a law to make it an offence to advocate any system which would limit the rights of ordinary citizens to have a say in the election of the government."

We broke off the discussion to listen to a lively passage by the Deputy Premier; and my thoughts ran off along the lines that Grey Suit had laid down. It struck me that the definition of a bill of the type he had suggested, would be a far stiffer proposition for India than for the older followers of the Western democratic principles. At home we could make the preaching of Communism or Fascism, or any other similar "ism," illegal very simply, if we wished to do so. All that would be necessary would be to declare it illegal to advocate a one-party system of government. That would do the trick. India cannot take that way out. She has one-party rule, and to judge by the attitude of the members during the day's debate, she is likely to go on with a single-party government for some considerable time to come.

By the nature of things, debates in the Central Legislative Assembly are not very stirring occasions. The body has a little too much the air of an ordinary debating society, or a mutual admiration society, for its exchanges to contain any of the parry and thrust inseparable from the conduct of public affairs in a country where there is a lively Opposition as well as a Government party. A minority of the Delhi Assembly members are at times of a critical turn of mind; but their criticisms are not based upon a fundamentally different outlook on the entire problem, as is the case, for example, in the British House of Commons. Criticism in the Indian Assembly springs mainly from personal idiosyncrasies, or from a parochial outlook.

One of the speakers in the debate on Home Affairs gave a prize display of the latter tendency. He was the only member that morning who spoke in Hindi, and his intervention in the discussion was conspicuous by its persistent failure to take a glimpse at wider issues. He was representing Delhi, and for Delhi he spoke. He had revised the war-cry of "India for the Indians" to "Delhi for the Delhi-ites." As far as I could learn from Dadar and Grey Suit, all he said in effect was that outsiders should not be given a place in the administration and public services of Delhi. It took him a long time to say so—so long that he was still on his feet when the third bell sounded and cut short his ramblings.

The idea of a time-limit for speakers, with a bell to ring indicating when the end of the allotted period is being reached, is a thoroughly sound one, and one which might with advantage be copied by other national chambers. I said as much to Grey Suit. He agreed grudgingly that the system was good, but added bitterly, "It isn't used to full advantage. The first bell should be rung as soon as a fool like that gets on his feet. You'd never think that Delhi is full of refugees, some of them extremely able men, and all of whom have got to be found jobs according to their capabilities and not according to whether or not they were born in the Delhi district."

Still, if Delhi's champion achieved nothing else, he brought forth from Sardar Patel, in his subsequent reply to the debate, an authoritative and startling summary of the existing situation in Delhi. The Deputy Premier described the city's sanitation as "quite abominable," and getting worse. He said that he was disturbed by the robberies and dacoities which were taking place. Stalls were being set up everywhere, and there had never been so many flies in New Delhi. The capital was becoming uninhabitable. He complained that if the Minister in charge of refugees wanted to remove any stalls, a crowd of angry people would

gather round his door ; and if he did not listen to them, they would go to the Prime Minister, or the Deputy Prime Minister, or some other Minister. His voice had a distinct edge to it when he added that the citizens had to be trained in their responsibilities.

In many ways the day's proceedings were admirably representative, not least in the frequency with which speakers referred to the aim of the new India to build up a secular state. It was a subject dear to the heart of Grey Suit, as well. His handsome head wagged endorsement every time it was mentioned. "We're all Indians now," he confided to me in a burst of enthusiasm after one reference to the matter by a Parliament Member. "We are Indians, just as you are Americans. You don't describe yourselves as Catholics, or Presbyterians, or Baptists. Why should we Indians be different ? All men worship a Supreme Being. In India, He has more forms than in your country, but the principle is the same. An Indian is an Indian. If he happens to be a Hindu as well, the Supreme Being will for him have many manifestations. If he is a Muslim as well as an Indian, he will call the Supreme Being 'Allah.' If he is a Parsee, he will worship the ancient teachings of Zoroaster and will revere the Sun as the visible symbol of a Superhuman Agency."

The Assembly as it is to-day affords a fair degree of evidence in support of that thesis ; and the Congress Party has throughout its history insisted that it represents all sections of the community and not merely the Hindus ; though they inevitably predominate in its ranks for the simple reason that they form the overwhelming majority of the population of the entire sub-continent. It will be easier to estimate the chances of the objective being attained after the first general elections have been held.

At the moment the Indian Government has Ministers drawn from the Muslim, Christian and Sikh communities as well as from the Hindus ; and there are members of

the Assembly from the Eurasian, Harijan, Parsee, and other minorities. Their presence is an inheritance from the days of British rule, when the utmost care was taken to ensure that all the minorities were represented. He would be a bold observer who would try to predict whether the same pattern will be maintained when the Assembly is selected by adult suffrage on the basis of a given number of members from each province in proportion to the population of the province. One vital factor is entirely unpredictable. No one at the moment can say how the Provincial Congress Parties will choose their candidates. That is the factor which must determine the nature of the Central Legislature; since at the present stage of Indian political development it is a foregone conclusion that the successful candidates will be, almost without exception, Congress nominees.

Whatever the complexion and nature of the Central Legislative Assembly, the present Government of India has shown itself faithful to the principle of the secular state, and has successfully avoided the danger of being persuaded into taking or condoning actions directed against religious minorities.

At one stage when refugees were pouring into the open spaces in and around Delhi, with canvas or nothing for their protection against the weather, there was a loud demand from Hindu Extremists that the refugees should be allowed to seek shelter within the Jumma Masjid Mosque. It must have been a grave temptation for those who had the formidable task of caring for the influx of homeless Indians, thousands of whom were either wounded or were in poor health as a result of privations on their flight from the East Punjab. An immense number of them could have been housed within the walls of one of the largest Mosques in the world. More could have been sheltered inside the subsidiary buildings of the Mosque; and even for those who could not squeeze inside, the well-cared-for forecourt

would have offered far greater comfort than the monsoon-soaked fields in which so many had to be left for lack of other accommodation. It is to the credit of the Indian authorities that they resisted the temptation. The Jumma Masjid, soaring impressively in the heart of Old Delhi, is as gracious and peaceful to-day as it was before partition.

It remains to be seen whether the next Assembly will be as wise and far-sighted as the present one has shown itself in many respects. There has been no slackening of the protestation of Congress Party spokesmen that all Congressmen stand for the development of a secular state with the fullest freedom of worship for all denominations, and persecution of none. But it is perhaps significant that when Indian speakers call upon the glorious past of their country, they almost invariably speak of the Asoka and Gupta periods. They do not seem to consider the Muslim Moghuls, who gave India nearly all the buildings which are regarded to-day as of prime importance and value, as ranking among the Indian rulers of note. If the majority of government officials nurse that outlook, friction might readily arise.

Grey Suit was firmly of the opinion that no difficulties will be encountered. "Whatever happens at the coming election," he asserted, "there'll be no change in the treatment of minorities. If we can once reach a settlement of the Kashmir problem, we can look forward to living in close friendship with Pakistan. We wouldn't be able to do so if we weren't allowing the Muslims every freedom in India. Not that the Muslims are doing the same where they are in the majority. Pakistan is a theocratic state and is steadily growing worse."

He might have been speaking on behalf of all the Members of Parliament. During proceedings that day, and on innumerable other occasions, they have advanced the same views, very often through the medium of the local newspapers, on the future of Indian policy and the contrast it

makes with the attitude of Pakistan. It is a superior attitude that must constitute a most severe irritant to Pakistan and to every Muslim who has elected to stay within the Indian frontiers.

One more respect in which the session was typical of the attitude of India's politicians was the reception given to the Home Minister's declaration on Hyderabad. The Council Chamber tingled with excited glee when he announced that the Government intended to push ahead with its plans for the reorganisation of that state. There were no warmer cheers throughout the morning than at the close of his proclamation, "Hyderabad is a settled fact which nobody can alter. It is a domestic affair and India is powerful enough to defy anybody." I could not repress a smile. His defiance of the lightning was so fervent that I felt that the least someone should do was to fire off a few photographic flash-bulbs. They might even have stimulated him to greater deeds of daring.

The men and women who form the Assembly have been fortunate. They have served on what will almost certainly prove to be the most important Assembly in the history of the new India. They have been privileged to pass legislation which will have a lasting effect upon their country's future, and to sit in judgement upon the efforts of those who have drafted the new constitution. It has fallen to them to endorse the plan by which the Republic of India is to remain within the British Commonwealth.

This last is a development that few people outside the top ranks of Indian opinion and a well-informed minority of the British had really considered as a possibility. Many Americans in India and at home assumed that the association was at an end, and that all that remained to be decided was the method and pace of the separation.

It is by no means universally popular among Indian politicians that India is still somewhat "connected" with the British Empire. Some of them have waxed very wroth



on the subject. The British bogey-man created by their own imaginations has grown into so firm a reality in their biased minds that they can see nothing else. The fact that Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, who went to jail time and again in his fight against British rule in India, and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, who actively dislikes anything British for no other reason than its being British—the fact that both these men have agreed that continued membership of the Commonwealth is a good thing for India, weighs nothing with their critics. Soaring joyously in the cloud-cuckoo land of their own vapourings, the snipers clutch at Nehru's own statements on the need for India to abstain from joining blocs as justification for their attacks.

The first Premier of independent India has had no easy task. Nor is there any indication that he will be able to lay down the burden when he wearies of carrying it. There are others who would gladly shoulder it in his place. Some say that his Deputy would be delighted to become Premier for a few years, while he still has the strength to impose his will, given the opportunity. But very few of the wiser heads can see a substitute for Nehru in the immediate future.

He paid one of his frequent visits to the Assembly while Patel was speaking on the affairs of the Home Ministry. He slipped quietly into his seat. The two leaders did not exchange a word or a sign either then or when the Premier left a short time later. In the intervening period, he sat in the front row of desks on the right of the Speaker's Chair. But though he was therefore directly opposite the gallery where we sat, we could gather no indication of what he thought of the report to the Assembly delivered by his Deputy. He did not once raise his head, but sat with it propped up on his hands, or drooped it forward on his chest.

I asked Grey Suit whether he thought the Prime Minister was asleep.

"He looks as if he might be," came the reply. "It wouldn't be at all surprising if he had seized on this time to relax and perhaps to snatch a short nap. He works longer hours and gets through more work than any other man in the country."

"It sure does seem a pity that he can't delegate more of his responsibilities to other members of the government," I commented laconically.

"Oh, he does hand over many problems to other Ministers and to permanent officials," Grey Suit reassured me, with solemnity, "but then he has to see that their tasks are carried out correctly."

Those remarks were devastating in their simplicity—and their accuracy. Friends in close touch with the Government of India told me later that it is no more than truth that *Nehru and his senior colleagues have to work as near twenty-four hours a day as their bodies will permit because of the shortage of men who have the knowledge, intelligence, and application demanded by the tasks of Government.* At a guess, I should think it is on the last of the three requirements that most of the subordinates, politicians or officials, fall down.

One profoundly-sympathetic but puzzled Englishman who has never seen India, but who is in close and constant touch with Indians in London, produced an amazingly-accurate summary of the situation when I met him after my return flight to England recently. "As far as I can figure out," he frowned, "there's a tremendous number of people thinking, talking, and planning about India's future, but precious few who really get down to it and dig."

There are, in fact, very few who do get down to it and dig. But it would be unjust to lay too great an emphasis on that aspect of the novel Republic of India. It is still very new. The members of the Legislative Assembly are all engaged in adjusting themselves to a changed world. For decades they have been able to talk as much and as

wildly as they pleased. It did not matter what they said. It did not matter very greatly what they did. They had the advantages of the Opposition, as in our American system, in that they could attack and criticise as freely as they wished, without having to do anything about it. But whereas the Opposition in the United States or Great Britain has always had to bear in mind that they might be landed with the job of running the country at the next election, India's politicians have never in the past been brought solidly up against that possibility. They have still not really acclimatised themselves to the idea. To a degree unknown in the older democracies, the Indian Parliament is literally just a "talking-shop."

Grey Suit was savage in his criticism of the amount of talk divorced from action that goes on. His verdict on the day's discussion of the refugee problem was that the miseries and crippling strain would go on for years unless the approach of the leaders became more realistic.

Dadar, on the other hand, was more optimistic and bubbled over with satisfaction when I remarked that, after all, every nation had faced growing pains in its early stages ; and that in America the process of advance to full nationhood had been slow and bloody. He expressed the view of the vast majority, too, on the subject of minorities. He wagged his head in ecstatic approval of all Grey Suit had to say about the future position of the Muslims in India ; and added his own comments on some of the minor groups.

"Nobody need worry," Dadar proclaimed. "Anglo-Indians, Goanese, and other Christian groups have more than a fair share of the posts in public service. They'll always be able to put their case to the government through their people in the Police, the Customs, and so on."

"What about the Parsees ?" I prompted.

"They'll be all right, too," he quipped. "They're considered the Jews of India. They don't have to care what government is in office. It'll always need them."

They are too useful as organisers for their interests to be neglected, and they control much of the big money."

It is certainly true that the few thousand fire-worshippers of Persian descent, who have resided in India since their ancestors fled from their native land in the seventh and eighth centuries to escape Mohammedan persecution, have secured for themselves by skill and industry an astonishingly privileged position among the Indians.

. Dadar had reflected the prevailing mood of politically-conscious India—confident to the point of carelessness.

It is an intoxicating atmosphere. The air of the capital city and of the Central Legislative Assembly is heady with the fumes of the wine of independence and power. The new India is acutely aware of her own position in the world. She looks out towards the smaller countries around her, and her breast swells with the consciousness of what she feels to be the path of duty and destiny.

If she survives the insidious effects of the intoxicants, she will be quite a woman when she grows older, this India.